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Natsunikotatsu

illustration
三弥カズトモ
Kazutomo Miya

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THE GUILD'S CHEAT RECEPTIONIST

Ilya the HaxOr. stays at the Guild's Reception

Monster Books

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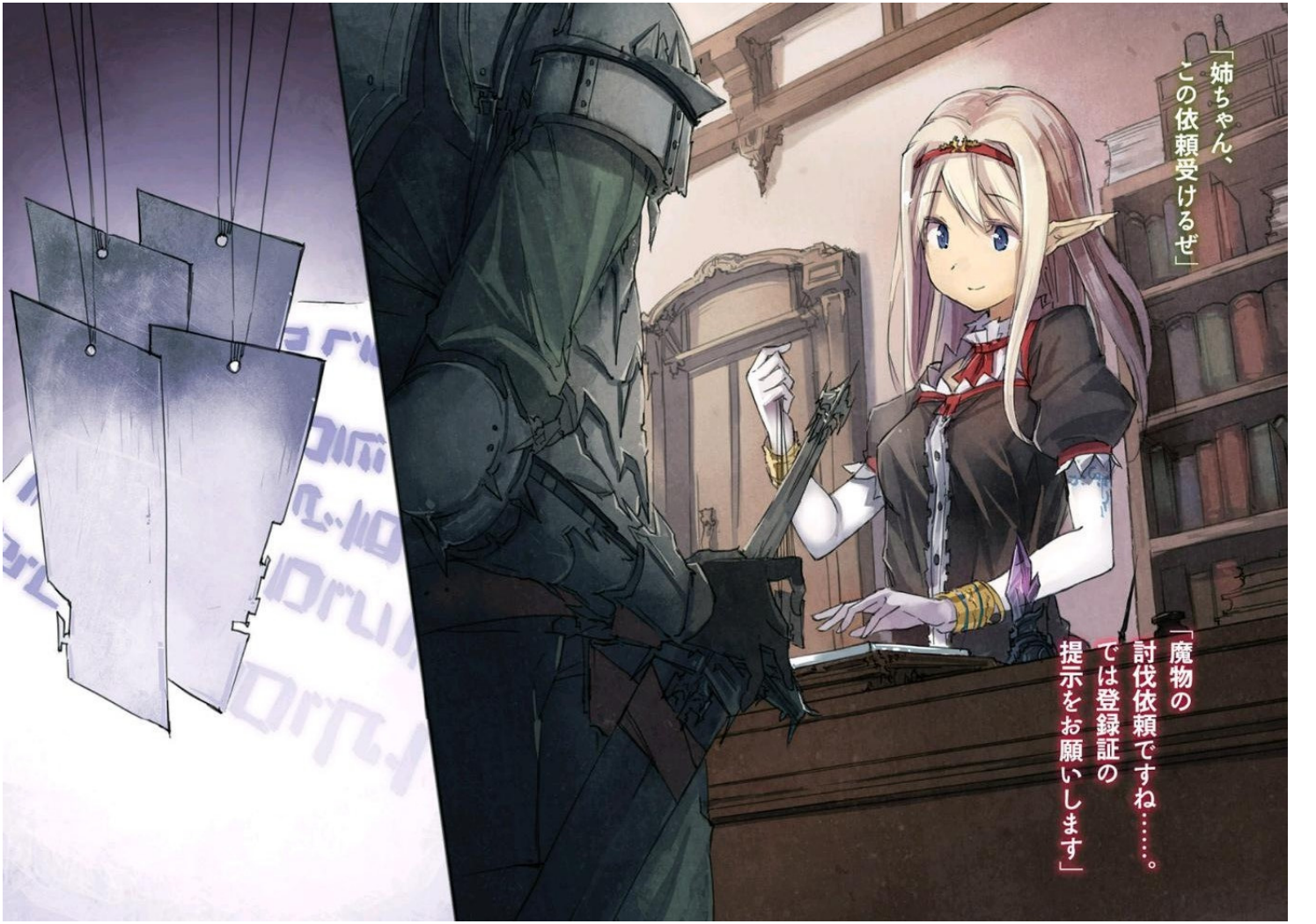
Monster Books

Frank Deshon
Guild Association
Luneville Branch
Branch Manager
Luneville
Territory Lord
Hector
Ilya's Cat Beastkin Colleague
Receptionist In Charge
of Waitress Duties
Ria
Haku
Dragon God's Kid
Ilya Schultz
Working at the Guild Association
Luneville Branch,
The Cheat Receptionist


「姉ちゃん、
この依頼受けるぜ」
「魔物の
討伐依頼ですね……。
では登録証の
提示をお願いします」

「イリアイリアイッリアぁ～っ！」
ルーラ
ダークエルフ、
古代魔術を使う魔導師。
「痛いですよ、ルーラ」

「私だって、
この街と皆さんが好きですから」
――だからごめん、
名前も知らない氷竜。

Prologue

“Welcome…”

The girl unenthusiastically greeted the guests entering the store.

It was a group of four that’d come in. She hadn’t met them before and it was her first time seeing them.

A muscle-brained swordsman, a gloomy magician, a seemingly malicious healer and a thief with a vulgar smile.

Though they were called thieves, they weren’t criminals, it was just the class’ occupation. She could see it. In addition to their classes, their HP’s and MP’s status as well as their levels were displayed in her vision.

Though while they’re considered a little depressing, it was endured since it’s due to their line of work and are convenient.

“Hey Nee-chan. I want to check commissions

however-”

The muscle-brained swordsman leaned forward onto the counter.

It’s stupid to ask someone before looking once. Swallowing back the words before they left her throat, the girl indicated towards the window on the left.

“There is a list on the bulletin board over there…”

“Ah, sorry!”

The group of four people walked towards the base of the bulletin board.

This place is the guild association’s Lunéville branch.

Its main operations include guild member registration and commission services, then verifying completion.

As a place meant for resting and exchanging information, many guilds were furnished with bars. The Lunéville branch was no exception, the tables as well as the chairs spread out in front of the girl were for that purpose.

Usually, a branch’s bar wouldn’t be considered

thriving, but the Lunéville branch's tables were currently completely filled. There were even people eating and drinking while leaning against the wall.

The time for lunch had passed long ago, most people from earlier had stayed.

"No one's working..."

Towards her grudging voice, the group of swordsmen sitting on the other side of the counter laughed with guffaws.

"That's impossible! This town is for it's bars and restaurants!"

"Cheap! Delicious! And above all there's beauties like Ilya-chan!"

"The Lunéville branch is the best! It has our gracious Ilya-chan!"

The two drunk swordsmen stuck our their tankards, getting more and more excited.

(Is it fine if I don't deal with them...?)

Continuing to be amazed, the girl—Ilya—felt sorry.

As the guild member from a moment ago said, this town's name was Lunéville. Contrary to its scale, it had few restaurants. The girl knew that she herself was the cause in the decrease of restaurants. Consequently, even though she felt sorry for what she did to the town's residents…

"Ilya-chan, another cup!?"

The swordsman across from her laughed pleasantly, this man getting her to do something was a former pub owner.

That was said for his honor though, it's not like he was getting drunk from being a useless person.

He originally made a bar for his love of sake, but as the branch's restaurant prospered his profits inversely plummeted, eventually having to close the establishment.

However, he was making use of his connection with the supplier here and earnestly asked her.

The swordsman next to him was here as an escort, midday today was when the sake was transported.

Right now was the height of its launch.

“Our grandma here is doing it diligently huh.”

“Of course, since Cecilita-san’s knife handling is perfect.”

She answered seriously this time.

Though she really was a help, the men took it as flattery and gave a wry smile.

“I really can’t thank Ilya-chan enough…”

(Though I’m the one that wants to give thanks.)

Besides Cecilita, a lot of the people who had ran the food businesses in this town work in the branch. Though the branch kidnapped tourists, they didn’t give a single complaint.

[If it’s Lunéville, you can eat delicious local cuisine that you haven’t even seen or heard of before.]

Such a thing was passed around, and the branch became famous for something other than its original function.

With more income than the guild branch, it wasn’t an

exaggeration to say that it was supported by its income as a restaurant.

“Nee-chan, we accept this commission.”

The muscle-brained swordsman from earlier showed a commission chart from the bulletin board.

The girl accepted the commission chart, placing it between two glass panels nearby.

“A monster subjugation commission…? Please present your registration cards.”

“Here ya go!”

She took the four presented registration cards, holding them up over the glass panel.

Charging it with magical power, the glass panel glowed with a faint light.

The glass panel was a magic tool, what was called a scanner. Along with previous violations and rank, it compared the contract to the guild record and determined whether or not the commission was possible to be accepted.

The light changed to blue and the luminescence vanished. The luminescence would have changed red if it was unadvised for them to accept it, blue light meant the document was approved.

(Alright, it's safe.)

With this there was no need for it to come to a complaint.

"The registration is complete."

Placing the registration cards and commission placed on the counter, she returned them.

"Since subjugation out of the corresponding area doesn't count, please be cautious… … Good luck."

"Yeah! Let's go!"

Gazing at their backs, she saw the group of four off.

"What's wrong, Ilya-chan? … … Ah, no way, is that your preference!?"

"No way. I was just thinking that with their abilities they could split up into two groups if they accepted another commission."

“Then… you should have told them.”

“That’s not in the job description.”

She wouldn’t do such a troublesome thing, the girl asserted bluntly.

Ranks were provided to guild members and requests to impose limits on accepting commissions.

Accordingly, she would give warnings to those people challenging ill-advised subjugation commissions.

It was useless most of the time, but those who listened to her warnings would listen to her words afterwards.

“If it’s Ilya-chan, she can see through anything.”

The man who was having his meal at the counter smiled without being sarcastic.

“I don’t know anything…”

Her words weren’t modesty, she couldn’t see a person’s past or emotions with [God’s Eyes].

“Yet again you’re being modest.”

The man said that as he sank his teeth into his favorite

dish, fried chicken.

Chewing and swallowing it, a subtle change occurred in his agility and endurance status. When uneasily digesting food, moreover using energy for digestion, endurance and agility would fall more than usual.

Her unique skill [God's Eyes]—a unique skill couldn't be obtained from just effort and talent—was at the maximum level value of ten.

When activated they could see through everything like god's eyes, seeing people's status and skills, potential, conditions and equipment in detail.

Not just a person's but also monster's skills and status, even details such as the effects of tools were the same.

Able to see a hostile opponent's remaining endurance and condition, their weak points, it was a skill that carried advantages for combat.

However, she didn't intend to demonstrate her ability to its maximum.

—She didn't want to kill anymore.

While living in this world, that was the decision she, who reincarnated, arrived at.

She had always been struggling.

Her biological parents feared her ability and abandoned her.

Driven out of the village, she wandered the world for five years beating down monsters and thieves in her dark past.

Then she arrived here, the Lunéville's guild branch, seeking haven.

That ordinary young man working like livestock in his previous life, Akino Tomoaki, was no more.

Tomoaki, who met the end of his life at a young age, was offered a completely cheat-filled life as recompense, which he accepted.

Now, his—no, her name is Ilya Schultz.

Working in the guild association's Lunéville branch, she was the cheat receptionist that gave the feeling of omniscience.

Chapter One – The Lunéville Branch

Part 1

“Ilya. Good work today.”

“Yeah, good work.”

Ria turned up at the counter from the office.

Ria was a black cat beastkin, hardly different from a human other than her ears and tail. Her bluish-black hair grew down to her shoulders, bobbing here and there. A very charming beautiful girl.

“Ilya, Lydia-san No. 5 so can you go to the kitchen?”

“Got it.”

No. 5 was for clocking out of work, No. 7 was for the restroom, No. 10 was for criminals, *etc.* In the guild, it became a custom to talk by saying numbers.

By the way, Lydia was the former proprietress of an old-time d’hote restaurant. The branch made use of the d’hote menu without changing it, but Ilya used her skill to alter the seasonings a bit.

Ilya left the reception to Ria and headed to the kitchen.

“Ilya-chan’s in the kitchen!?”

“Did you hear that you bastards!?”

“””Uooooooh!”””

Though she heard the cheers behind her, she pretended to not notice and continued.

When she put on an apron and washed her hands after entering the kitchen, she came across Lydia leaving work. Ilya stopped walking, bowing respectfully.

“Thank you very much for today.”

“No, that’s what I was hired for right?”

Lydia laughed along with the kitchen workers cheerfully.

“Always with the formality.”

“Because I am grateful for you doing this for me!”

“Really! Because originally you bankrupted me!”

“””” Ahahaha “””

From the overlapping laughter, Ilya’s heart warmed a

little.

“Ilya! The orders!”

“Oh, yes!”

In the kitchen, a frantic voice could be heard coming from Rachelle, a human waitress in the dining area. Ilya ran to the station in a hurry. The human species spreads far and wide, acquainting themselves with other races. A general race name for those that don’t have animal parts or the extreme skeletons of dwarves and the like.

Entering, Ilya took the grilling area spot. She could easily adjust the temperature in precise amounts thanks to the [Appraisal] skill, as well as adjust the amount of seasonings.

“Ilya-chan, you’re so lively compared to when you’re at the reception desk!”

“It’s just the shabby men then, don’t you want to be lavished with compliments as well!?”

“Ahahaha! That’s for sure!”

While the madam was having a conversation like that, she continued with her skilled cooking. Even with the assistance of her skill, Ilya was completely beaten by her in proficiency.

(Ah~, I want to be with Ria more.)

Likely due to her retaining her memories from prior to her reincarnation, she was still completely uninterested in the opposite sex. Rather, taking advantage of being the same sex, she wanted to flirt with Ria.

She grappled with the fire for four hours while holding such worldly desires.

“Chocolate banana parfait, vanilla ice cream…”

“Oka~y”

“…Closing~”

It was time for the restaurant to close. From late night onward, it became a bar with nothing but light snacks on the menu.

Endurance wasn’t a big deal, but there’s no way to get around mental fatigue.

“Ilya, good work today.”

“Yeah, you too.”

Frank, who was taking over the kitchen now, called out to Ilya. Like many humans, he had blue eyes and brown hair. He always wore a gentle smile, the type of man like a reliable elder brother.

The townspeople consider him an innocent-looking man, but the reality was different. Assuming the position of guild branch manager at the young age of twenty, his status and skills were higher than kingdom knights’. Above all, he was influential enough to drive

out the thieves guild that built its nest in Lunéville. That was the true nature of the man named Frank.

“Have you taken your break yet today?”

“No, I wanted to prepare the kitchen for tomorrow.”

Though Ilya used a polite way of speaking as a default for anyone, she used it for him to show sincerity.

She owed Frank a debt of gratitude. She was outclassed by him.

“Is that so? Thanks as always.”

“No…”

Thank you. Whenever she heard words of thanks, she was attacked by guilt.

In Ilya’s own status, her charm level, which is categorized in the sub-status, was 9999.

The effect was tremendous, continuous activation, S-rank intensity, and resist immune. Those who have seen the owner, those who were seeing the owner, those who were hearing the owner’s voice; it interfered with their minds, turning them into slaves.

Since the effect couldn't voluntarily be turned off, it could already be called a curse.

Consequently, she used one of her unique skills, [God King Barrier]. [God King Barrier] blocked both the owner's and opponent's physical attacks, magic, spirit magic, ancient magic, sacred magic, and curse magic. Nullifying all skills, it interrupted all status abnormalities and mind interference.

Though the barrier was invincible, it consumed 999 magical power per second. Ilya being able to maintain the barrier with her nearly inexhaustible supply of magical power was a feat.

Although using the [God King Barrier] would stop things affecting her status, whenever she was talked to with kind words she would be seized with anxiety, "It isn't stopping the effect".

"Ilya?"

"Eh?"

She always brooded deeply while stocking goods. When she came back to her senses from the voice,

Frank was looking at Ilya's face with an expression of worry.

"Are you alright?"

"Ah, sorry. I was just thinking a little."

She used the [Alchemy] skill and [Mixing] skill to create the remaining miso and soy sauce.

Since Frank knew that Ilya had these skills, she was able to use them without hesitation.

She actually used ancient magic's space-time magic for maturing and fermenting, but she convinced him it was alchemy. Modern people couldn't decode ancient magic, with only two people in this world being able to use it. Moreover, space-time magic was designated a taboo.

Since she didn't want troublesome things as much as possible, she asked the agriculture guild to prepare sake and vinegar for miso and soy sauce, but the results weren't that good.

"Alright, now..."

Continuing to prepare the soy sauce and miso for a while, she also prepared desserts like iced pudding, tiramisu, and créme d'anjou.

"Branch manager, I'll be leaving first."

"Yeah. Good work today."

The moment she heard the casual words of appreciation, Ilya yet again realized how comfortable her current circumstances were.

She woke up early in the morning after sleeping soundly.

Brushing her teeth and taking a shower, she changed from her pajamas into her exclusive equipment [Miko's Restraint].

Her bra, panties, long gloves and knee socks were snow white with light blue lines here and there.

Though they were originally cursed tools that lowered someone's status and turned them into an evil god's sacrifice, Ilya inherited them when she defeated an evil god. She increased the effect of her equipment by twenty times with the [Training] skill and equipped

[God's Divine Protection], a choker that doubled each piece of equipment's effectiveness. With this she was roughly at the level of an average grown man, though since it had no effect on her sub-status, [God King's Barrier] was essential.

Putting her uniform on top of those, Ilya descended to the first floor. Though it still wasn't time for work, she was still ready to leave at any moment in case of emergency. Doing this first thing in the morning had become a habit.

"Good morning."

As she went behind the counter from the staff entrance near the office's entrance, she greeted the two receptionists. Human relations was important.

"Ah, morning Ilya."

"Morning."

Ria was at the reception desk today.

Her tail swaying above her rather short skirt doubled the cuteness, healing Ilya's heart.

The other person, Luke, was human. Though he was generally blunt when interacting with Ilya, he was really just trying to hide his embarrassment.

Ria also didn't mind him and told Ilya there was a message for her.

"Hector-san was looking for you. He said he wanted you to go to him as soon as I saw you."

"Hector-san? Got it."

"E-even though you said you got it, why haven't you stopped stroking it?"

It was natural since Ria was so cute.

(Please let me heal a bit more.)

When she thought that, a group of two that seemed to be tourists came in.

Ilya reluctantly stopped, deciding to head towards Hector.

Hector was the town's lord.

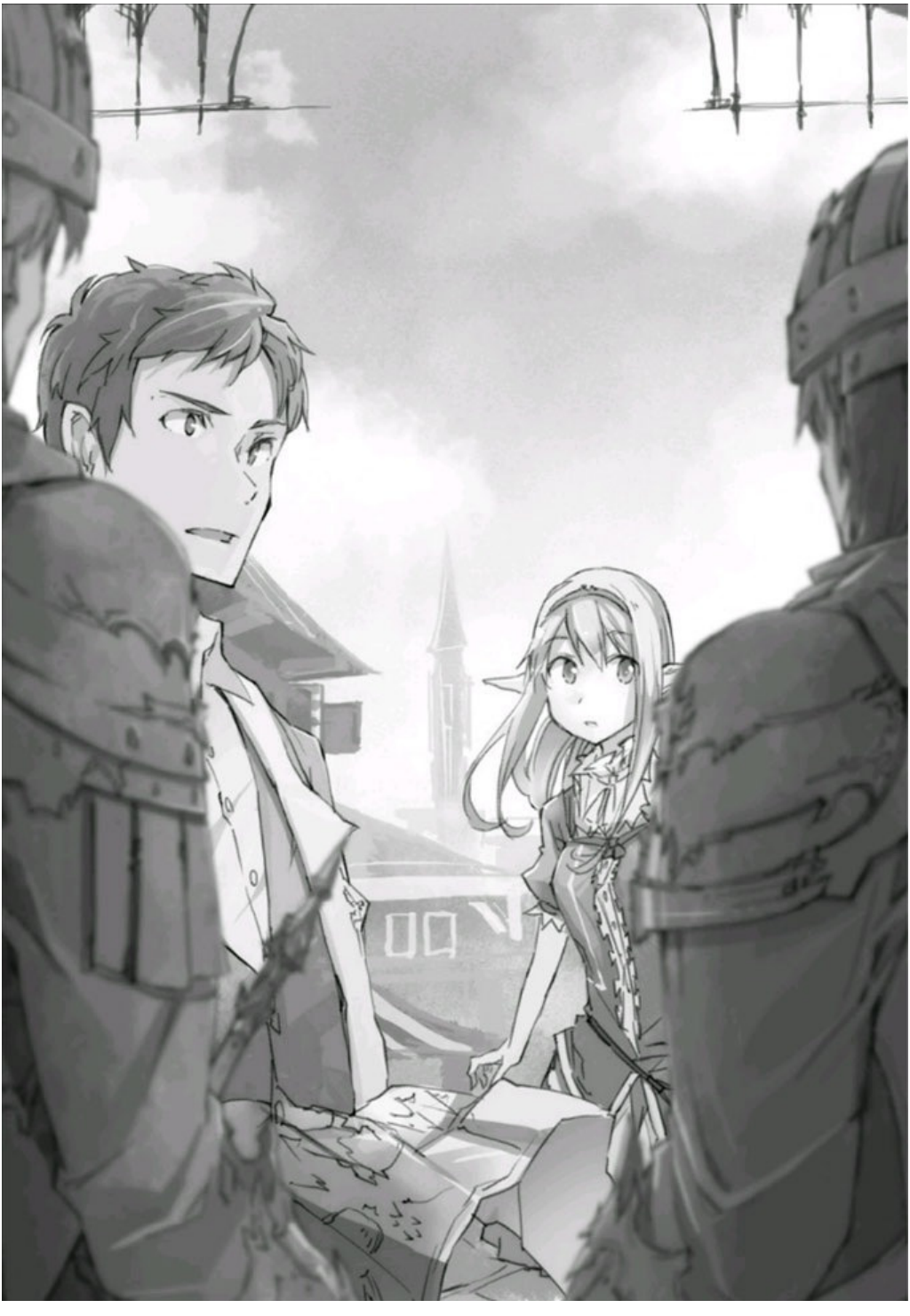
Earning military achievements in the neighboring

country Filéalemis' civil war, he was originally a human knight given a court rank and territory. However, a commoner rising up drew opposition from nobles. Driving him away was a huge problem at the time, so he become the lord of Lunéville.

He himself wasn't dissatisfied, though, and could often be seen strolling through the town. Due to Hector's friendly disposition, he gave aid to townspeople that didn't have jobs while exchanging jokes with them.

When she arrived in front of the lord's manor, the private gatekeeper guard told her that Hector had headed to the west gate. Of course, Ilya was accustomed to being sent around this much and didn't get discouraged.

While exchanging greetings with people on the street, she once again arrived at the west gate. She saw Hector surrounded by escorts and gatekeeper guards.



“Good morning.”

“Ah, Ilya. Morning. Sorry for calling you.”

Hector bowed his head.

She felt like a lord shouldn’t depreciate themselves for a person, but she decided to leave that alone since the surrounding people were smiling wryly.

“No, it’s fine. Rather, is something wrong?”

That is, when he called for Ilya, nine out of ten times it was related to a request for the guild.

Though Charon was generally in charge of public relations, the office’s staff couldn’t leave the office due to accumulating paperwork. The branch manager casually leaving the branch would also be a problem.

So Ilya was recognized as the errand runner.

As for the lord, he was perceptive and tight-lipped. Though he called Ilya because he had a general evaluation of her knowledge and judgement capabilities, towards the girl who retained memories from her previous life as a man, that intention was

never transmitted.

“There’s no conclusive evidence yet, but… apparently, it seems that a rondébear appeared on the westward road.”

The Rondéville bear, commonly called the rondébear. Inhabiting areas throughout the country Rondéville, it was a bear-type monster that had well-developed and powerful forelimbs. Gentle for a monster, it was low risk since it was omnivorous. However, it would go into a rage and start attacking people immediately after waking from hibernation, becoming unmanageable for unskilled mercenaries. It was a comparatively high leveled monster.

However, it was the middle of spring, and omnivores should’ve had no reason to appear on the road.

“…That’s strange.”

It wasn’t just about the food.

That group of four from the day before accepted a monster subjugation commission around there, near the road to the west.

Though it would be good if it was needless worrying, it would be troublesome if they were related.

“I’ll return to the branch and look into it at once. Will a subjugation commission be put out?”

“Yeah. Please give me a quote.”

“Alright. Then, later.”

When she returned to the branch, the dining room was crowded with people who came to eat breakfast.

(Work, you guys!)

She kept complaints like that to her mind, immediately heading towards the office.

“Claude-san, estimate the reward for a rondébear subjugation commission, please and thank you.”

“A rondébear huh? Got it! I wonder what the going rate is~”

While Frank was young, Claude had been working at the branch office the longest and handled his work pretty quickly.

After that, he looked towards Desiree, a dog beastkin

woman sitting down opposite of Claude.

“Desiree-san, please look for a subjugation commission near the west road.”

“Is around two months fine?”

“Yes, thank you.”

Though almost everyone at the branch was Ilya’s senior, Ilya always felt admiration towards their obedience. They worked fast and didn’t put stock in useless pride, nothing but skilled personnel like that.

Since she was no longer worried about the preparations of the subjugation with this, she went outside to investigate something.

(My clothes… are they fine as-is?)

Just then, she noticed Ria and Luke’s gazes from the reception desk.

“Is something wrong?”

“N-no! It’s nothing!”

Ria turned back to the reception desk, flustered and blushing. She thought it was odd, but since it was so

adorable she decided to not mind it.

Watching Ilya's back as she continued out of the branch office, Ria turned towards Luke while waving her arms buzzingly.

"Just now, Ilya looked so cool!"

"...We have to obey the rules."

Ria had on a flushed expression and Luke recalled Ilya from just now with a wry smile.

Though Ilya didn't seem like it, when an emergency request came in to be prepared, her atmosphere completely changes from her usual languidness.

"I wonder if a woman can do it. You'd better not show off!"

"You're also aiming for her, Ria? Your names are similar too."

"That has nothing to do with it! ... Let's try it."

"Try what?"

Clearing her throat, she gave a cool expression.

“Luke…”

“You don’t look foolish enough to do it.”

“I haven’t said anything yet!?”

“You guuuys, your salaries are going to be lowered if you keep playing arooound.”

“Welcooome”

Hearing Claude’s voice from the office, the two straightened themselves and turned back towards the dining room.

The dining room was filled with the regular customers’ laughter from seeing their exchange and what happened immediately after.

Part 2

Meanwhile, having left the branch office, Ilya headed towards the south gate.

There was a soldier on guard watching the gate, but loosened his expression when he saw it was Ilya.

“Oh, Ilya-chan. Are you heading out?”

“Yes. For a little stroll.”

“Take care.”

“Thank you very much.”

Then, detouring a little from the south gate, she advanced towards the forest to the southwest.

Even if she went to investigate, she wouldn’t set foot inside the forest. Whether it be Ilya’s past life or current, insects were her weak point. She couldn’t enter forests, they were filled with insects.

“I wonder if this place is fine?”

Confirming that there was no signs of anyone nearby, she activated her unique skill [Clairvoyance].

However, it had been a long time since she'd seen areas like a forest. Making a mistake in the adjustments, Ilya very clearly saw a large quantity of insects.

"Gyaaaaaaaaah!"

Without holding back, she screamed because of the horror. Before long she came to her senses and was harassed by chills.

(… Uuu… gross… But… the results were good.)

She then went back to the branch office, clinging to Ria for a while to soothe her emotions.

"Tyrant spider…"

Hector, coming to receive the estimate, heard that name from Ilya in the reception office and was speechless.

The tyrant spider was a huge monster spider with the head of an adult human male.

It's mouth could swallow a person whole and its exoskeleton couldn't be damage by unskilled attacks.

Its fangs could crush iron and its talons had a paralyzing poison, preferring to swallow its prey alive.

Its legs were agile and had high jumping power, could move quickly, and its threads couldn't be burned even by low rank magic.

The title of 'tyrant' wasn't just for decoration, it was a monster suited to be the forest's boss. Among the bosses Ilya memorized, its degree of risk was at the top.

(The other monsters were afraid since something like that was in the forest and ran away then?)

This was the reason why the rondébear appeared along the west road.

Frank was also there, wearing a bitter expression.

"Then, Ilya. You believe that more monsters will be expelled from the forest?"

"Yes. If you get more information from Willville to the west and Ahrew Fort farther southwest than the forest, I believe we will have more conclusive evidence."

By Ilya's conjecture, the amount of subjugation requests for monsters coming from the forest would increase.

"Frank. As the branch manager, I want to hear your opinion."

"The tyrant spider is a disaster designated monster. It seems wise to deal with it immediately by inviting large scale participation from guild headquarters."

"How long would it take?"

Hector looked towards Ilya.

To prepare the request, it would take a day using messenger magic just for Rondéville's guild headquarters to become aware of it. But for the request to be passed from there to each branch, it would need five days to gather the personnel. Moreover, since the means of transportation coming to Lunéville was limited...

"Ten days until the departure. As for the reward, an equal split of twenty million gils?"

"Just ten days to get them together?"

“Twenty million?”

Hector’s and Frank’s questions to Ilya were about separate things.

“In the first place, ten days doesn’t leave any extra time, and is also meant as a sieve. Since only the truly strong will be here to take action.”

In many ways. Of course, those words were muttered inwardly.

“Twenty million is the basic reward. If you claim retrieved raw materials as additional rewards, there won’t be able complaints.”

Every top ranked guild member thirsted more for materials than money.

Then, rather than adding a monetary reward for claimed materials, that delicious condition ought to catch their interest.

“Moreover, commission the county’s knights as well. Hector-san, please make the arrangements.”

“Threaten headquarters and the country huh?”

Hector smiled wryly.

“Surely not.”

As if it was a misunderstanding, Ilya produced her best smiling face.

She had nothing but good intentions.

Towards headquarters, it had the hidden meaning: “You can obtain twenty million and rare materials. However, the country will take it if you aren’t quick!”

Towards the country, it had the hidden meaning: “Rather than paying twenty million and the intermediary fee to the guild, the salary and food for fifty knights for a month is cheaper. Please do your best before the guild takes the initiative!”

(You know, good intentions.)

Once again thinking it over, Ilya nodded in her heart.

“Though there certainly isn’t any time to spare, isn’t that a little rushed?”

“But aren’t spiders yucky?”

“““…”””

Since she was answering seriously, they were even more amazed.

Though they weren't fully satisfied with a few things, Ilya judged there were no rejections and made one last suggestion.

"For this commission, would it be alright for me to put my name on the commission label?"

"I don't mind but..."

"Could I ask why?"

Naturally, it was unnatural for a guild branch's reception to submit a commission for a town's serious affair. Understanding that the two were doubtful, Ilya put on a smile and gave a reason that wasn't outrageous.

"Insurance!"

Ten days later, it was the appointed date.

Only five people gathered.

However, when Frank showed them in to the reception office, Hector was not disappointed.

However, he was confused and his head couldn't keep up.

"Ilya Ilya I-ly-aaa~!"

"That hurts, Lula."

The one who had just embraced Ilya and rubbed her cheeks against her was Lula, a dark elf with brown skin and long ears.

Though elves and dark elves were primarily on bad terms with each other, Lula had completely embraced Ilya. Rather than saying she liked her, saying love might be more correct. She was a yuri girl.

However, Lula was one of the two people that could use ancient magic. When she last saw her, her class was [Mage], but now it was [Master Mage]. It appeared that Lula didn't neglect putting effort into her studies.

While feeling relieved by that, Ilya pat her head and Lula closed her eyes in happiness.

The boy watching the scene muttered.

"Envious..."

“Chriiiiis~?”

“Hiii-! I was kidding! So lower that fist!”

“Selena. Surely, this time I also want to flirt with Selena~”

“Eh? Eeeh~!?”

“Stup-, what are you saying, Eric!?”

Repeating that kind of a comedic dialogue, the trio were the mercenary guild [Stars of the Eternal Night]. Chris the swordsman, Selena the fighter, and Eric the summoner. These three were also Ilya’s acquaintances.

Ilya met them when she roamed various countries in a chain of islands to the east. During their journey they defeated devils, as well as defeating an arch devil duke. Though they weren’t even twenty years old, they had stupidly large ability. She was relieved they continued their lively journey.

“Ilya-sama. Make me your pupil-”

“No.”

“But…”

The young elf that crumpled forward was named York.

Though Ilya took a cold attitude towards elves, he respected her and didn’t mind it.

More than that, he glared at Lula clinging to Ilya.

“Lula, you bitch…! Don’t touch Ilya with your standing of a dark elf!”

“Umm… who are you?”

While clinging to her, Lulu looked down on York. With a cramp on his handsome face, he turned his face away from her.

“S-settle down Undine. It’s too early to make an example out of you.”

“Amazing… that spirit…”

Feeling power overflowing from the young man next to her, Selena let out a surprised voice.

Then, by Ilya’s chest, Lulu stared at York with scornful eyes while knitting her eyebrows.

“Undine… elf… ah! You’re York!? That stupid elf that contracted the great spirit of the elf fountain!”

“Watch what you say, dark elf. It would be easy for me to turn you into an icicle at any moment.”

“Hah. Before that I’d crush you flat!”

(Ah… these people just won’t grow up.)

Letting out a sigh, she tore Lula away from her body.

“You two, please stop it.”

“Oka~y”

“Yeah.”

With the place becoming quiet, Ilya turned towards Hector.

“I am sorry. It seems that the limitations were a little too severe…”

“No, it’s fine. Quality is better than quantity for this.”

Towards Hector’s words, Ilya nodded in her heart.

The mercenary guild’s master gave the stamp of approval to [Stars of the Eternal Night]’s capabilities.

Deciphering ancient magic, and furthermore the best prodigy of the magic guild creating many magics, Lula. Contracting with the great spirit, Undine, whose strength was said to be like a water dragon's, York the genius.

If it's these members, they surpassed even an evil god to say nothing of a devil.

"Hector-sama, sorry for the inconvenience but would it be alright to stop the dispatch of knights? If you inform them of these members, there shouldn't be any problems."

"Ah, yeah. That is, I already stopped the knights' dispatch."

"Eh?"

Soothing Ilya that had knit her brows, Frank spoke.

"Don't be angry. There was a directive from the guild association saying the dispatch was unnecessary."

"Ah, probably because of us."

Chris, whose cheek had swollen, spoke up.

“We told mercenary guild O-chan to not worry since we were going.”

“I see…”

The guild association knew the people participating so they closed recruitment early. That’s why there were this few people.

“Huh? If that’s the case then how were Lula and them able to receive the request? Wasn’t recruitment withdrawn immediately?”

“Of course, I got the commission by using Ilya’s name.”

“I gave a strict order to the magic guild’s staff to report it to me as soon as they found a commission from Ilya-sama.”

Ilya was a little frightened by the two’s obsession.

(Though it was insurance… let’s not do that from now on.)

Feeling a danger to her body, she decided that.

At any rate, there was no problem with accomplishing the commission. Ilya showed them around inside the

branch office, deciding to explain the content of the commission.

“These are the important parts. We will appraise the quality of materials you bring back, please sincerely keep that point in mind.”

“““Oka~y”””

If they brought back something like its charred remains, she’d be troubled.

“Please don’t disturb the ecosystem… Good luck.”

Ilya saw the five off, looking towards the forest in the distance.

Spider. Rest in peace.

Praying to not be reminded of its appearance, Ilya looked rather calm.

If you were to describe the conclusion, it was a landslide victory for the five.

York sealed the spider’s movement by freezing it’s joints with a spread of Ice Rocks, while Lula destroyed its exoskeleton by dropping a meteor on it from above

with Strike Nova.

Finishing it off, Chris' Transcendent Sword Saint Strike.

Pathetically, the spider was defeated in an instant.

After that, it went without saying that Ilya received the spirited approaches from everyone as they returned. All of the five people wished to live together with Ilya.

However, she didn't accept their wishes.

"Ilya, is it alright?"

She was asked by her colleague Ria, who saw everything from start to finish. She responded with a clear expression.

"Because I love this town, and everyone in it."

This is good for now.

It's up to fate to see if our paths will cross again.

Ilya determined yet again that until that time came, she would continue to take life slow and live happily.

Chapter Two – The Dragon

Part 1

The country neighboring Rondéville, Filéamis.

In the eastern part of a forest, three youths were walking.

One of them, a young raccoon beastkin, raised the bag in his hand and smiled wryly.

“That firehound was pretty strong.”

“Only since you underestimated it.”

“Ow-”

Poked with the scabbard’s tip, the raccoon beastkin almost stumbled.

Though he scowled at the youth that looked like a bird with eyes of protest, he knew that he couldn’t deny it, laughing jokingly instead.

Watching the two from the side, the otter beastkin mumbled a complaint as he looked up towards the clouds passing overhead.

“Really though, there hasn’t been any tension recently…”

The three youths were from the same generation of the town. Knowing each other from childhood, they’ve lived their day-to-day lives as members of the mercenary guild together for a long time.

Monster hunting was exciting at first, and even though they could even do a D-rank commission nowadays as long as they didn’t relax their guard, it felt lacking in something.

Still, they didn’t have the fighting spirit nor craving to strive for ranks higher than that, living day by day in a habitual fashion.

“It’s fine, isn’t it? We’re still young, something good will happen sooner or later.”

“Yeah… Hey, how ’bout going to the red-light district with our earnings this time?”

“Aaah, I want moneeey, I want wooomen.”

While talking leisurely, the three people advanced through the forest.

This path was the shortest route to the town and was an animal trail filled with weeds and tree branches extending into it in many places.

Naturally, there were many blind spots. But they were fighters, not neglecting to keep searching for enemies.

After a few minutes, the young birdkin stood still.

“What’s up?”

“…That thing there, what is it?”

Looking towards the direction he pointed out, there was a pure white oval buried in the tall grass.

The group of three exchanged looks with each other and carefully drew closer to the object.

“This is…”

“…An egg?”

It was an egg slightly smaller than a basketball.

When they moved their hands towards it to pick it up and get a closer look, it shined a wondrous seven-colored light. Before they knew it, the three were entranced by the egg.

Just then, they clearly heard a loud sound resounding from far away. Flustered, the three checked their surroundings.

"...Is something there?"

"N-no, there's nothing..."

The three once again focused on the egg.

"Not sure, but... isn't this rare?"

"...Might be expensive, we should probably sell it."

They all smiled at the raccoon beaskin's words.

Good luck had unexpectedly rained down on them.

Without saying anything else, the three hurried towards the town.

Changing time and location, now to the east of Rondéville.

"What are you two doing next?"

A Balta Fort sentry greeted the two women.

Unlike the sentries that wore full body armor, the two wore relatively lightweight equipment. But due to the

weapons they carried, he could tell the two were guild members.

Though the sentries were all male, he didn't call out to them with a bad motive. In a short period of time, the two shared an action with each other in understanding. Unable to guess the significance of the gesture, the tiger beastkin inclined his neck.

"What did that mean?"

"Lodging. Can we stay at the fort?"

Saying that, the beastkin woman looked at the human woman next to her.

The two turned towards the sentries simultaneously, the human woman opening her mouth to speak.

"Though that was our plan… is something wrong?"

Towards her concerned expression, the sentry denied it by waving his hand and giving a strained laugh.

"Heading southwest from here would lead you to a town named Lunéville though you know? If you're planning on staying a while I recommend heading

there."

"Lunéville?"

Speaking of towns near Batla Fort, Pinéaville and Harville were well-known.

As Pinéaville was the closest port city to the Akradist Kingdom's border, it was famous for its flourishing shipping and fishing industries. In contrast, that liveliness lead to poor security in some parts.

Harville was an inn town that connected the royal capital and Pinéaville on the main road. Gathering many people coming by ship from Akradist and Pinéaville, their lodging and food costs were increasing.

But with the information the women purchased before coming to this continent, they had never heard of a town named Lunéville.

"It's a good town. Lodging is cheap and the public order is good."

"No matter what, the food is delicious!"

Another sentry leaned forward and said that.

“Food? That’s it?”

“Yeah! They have really interesting food there!”

“It’s also nice to interact with the children there.”

“Yeah! Everyone is so sociable, and that elf receptionist kid’s listless expression—”

Despite the sentries starting to get on a different topic, the two women exchanged looks.

“Shall we?”

“Hmm…”

The human women looked at the sentries.

They weren’t people who would deceive others to earn money, they understood that from the sentry’s conducts thus far. In addition to that, to her who had left nobility, she could easily see through a person’s expression into their true character behind the darkness.

“I think going there is fine.”

“It’s settled then. As for me, I want to see the elf.”

“That’s why!?”

Her motives aside, the tiger beastkin, Katia Maiski belonged to the mercenary guild. The human woman, Elivia Granka, belonged to the magic guild. Their destination changed to Lunéville.

“Heeeh, it’s pretty big.”

“I was pretty anxious when the main road ended midway, but now I’m relieved.”

No longer worrying about having to sleep outdoors, the two walked headed Lunéville in high spirits.

The main street was properly paved and water could be seen flowing under the street from the central park in the distance, producing a refreshing sensation.

Used to seeing Akradist’s uniform bright white townscape of slanted roofs facing the sea, Lunéville and Balta Fort’s townscape looked very ordinary.

However, the branch in front of them stood out.

Though it didn’t change away from the bilateral

symmetry it shared with the other buildings, with its steps and porte-cochère projecting from the entrance way supported by stone pillars, looking up at its design from the front gave a solemn and profound feeling. Though it was by no means picturesque, there was a sublime beauty within its admirable harmony. Note 1)

But of the few people walking nearby, none stopped to view the building.

“I wonder if everyone is used to seeing it?”

“…Maybe.”

When their eyes met those of people passing by, they were given amiable smiles. They hadn’t experienced that for a long time, recalling that they were countrymen, the two smiled at each other.

“…Go in?”

“…Yeah.”

Asking each other to try and prepare themselves to enter, they opened the wooden doors that gave a dignified feeling. Looking inside the branch, they stiffened at the view once again.

A large number of people were in the dining hall.

There were people talking excitedly, people engrossed in eating, as well as staff running to and fro serving tables. Despite being a reasonably large town, the amount of people on the street felt strangely small. It wouldn't have been wrong to think all of the town's people were crammed in there.

"Welcome."

A clear voice reached their ears, returning the two who had stopped moving to their senses.

Not needing to search for the owner of the voice, their gazes were attracted to the girl standing behind the reception desk.

With long and radiant golden hair, the girl had snow white skin and deep blue eyes that were reminiscent of the ocean. She expressed a beautiful smile that shook their hearts, her beauty had magic that made it hard to resist and stop looking.

They saw long ears on the sides of her small face.

Though their knowledge wasn't too precise, there was

no mistaking that appearance.

(That's...)

(The rumored elf...)

The same as just a moment earlier, their feet moved forward on their own as though lured in.

They wondered if the people making noise nearby were used to the girl. Or perhaps, they were drunk from her magical power?

While Elivia was suspicious of their surroundings, and while Katia considered her to be a magician, they started a conversation with the elf girl.

"You guys are pretty successful here."

Letting those words slip out unhindered, Elivia was surprised at herself.

With a smile that filled her whole face, the elf girl responded with a simple, "Thankfully".

From that single word, the two were already charmed.

Despite being members of the same sex, the two unconsciously embraced feelings of jealousy, not to

mention envy. It was a longing similar to veneration, so to speak.

“Are you two here on a mission?”

There were two reasons for them coming to the branch first.

Accept a commission to earn travelling expenses, as well as to collect information while accepting the commission.

“No, we were recommended to this place by sentries at Balta Fort.”

“They said if we were going to stay somewhere, Lunéville would definitely be better than Pinéaville or Harville.”

With the two unhesitatingly answering, the elf girl seemed to be convinced.

“Oh, you girls here for the first time?”

“Welcome to this place then.”

Katia and Elivia were aware that their appearances were ordinary.

But even so, they were two women and it wouldn't be unusual to be assaulted, and had even been stared at with dangerous eyes several times before. So when the two men seated at the counter gave them words of welcome, they became more vigilant. In order to stop it from happening.

However, despite their vigilance, the men seated at the tables started talking to the guests.

"Please."

Prompted by the elf girl, the two sat in empty seats.

Looking over the dining hall again, most of the tables were filled with smiles. Of the guilds they'd visited so far, there was the same level of success, but the hustle and bustle wasn't as harmonious as this place's.

"Have you decided on an inn to stay at?"

"No, I decided to come and eat first. The sentries at the fort said the food here was delicious."

Saying it somewhat provocatively, Elivia was surprised.

(It happened again.)

Before she knew it, she had no vigilance or tension towards her like when she talked with Katia, her companion. Her mental state speaking with the elf was amiable.

She thought it was strange, but didn't think anything was suspicious.

The elf girl's expression softened a little further at Elivia's words.

"I don't know whether or not we will be able to meet your expectations, but… Elizah—"

Calling out in a clear voice, a fox beastkin dressed in the same clothes as the elf girl came over.

Though many fox beastkin eyes were tsurime, hers didn't seem to be. If anything, they felt gallant. She had swaying light brown hair and large ears with a big tail tipped white. Together with her garments, she produced an adorable atmosphere.

"What's up, Ilya. Ah—"

Saying up to there, Elizah saw the two girls sitting at the counter and realized why she was called.

“Welcome. You’ll have your menus in a moment.”

With a refined smile that didn’t feel forced at all, she bowed. Taking menus from the stack of them next to the counter’s hatch, she immediately returned to the two.

Looking at the menus in their hands, the two’s eyes opened wide.

Each item listed had realistic pictures next to it. Written along with that was each dish’s effect and the way to cancel it.

Even more so than the amount of items on the menu, just looking at the various pictures caused their stomachs to feel empty, distracting them from being able to choose.

“Let’s seeee. Our gold is a bit spotty, guess we need work…”

While the two were worrying next to the counter, several men and women who were sitting paid their

bill and stood up.

One man and woman had a sword, one man had a bow, and a woman had a spear. Belonging to the mercenary guild, their vanguard and rear guard was balanced.

The group stood in front of the bulletin board, talking with each other as they looked through the commission charts. Before long, they picked one.

“Ilya-chan, this one please.”

They brought a commission chart with a monster subjugation written on it.

“Certainly.”

Receiving their registration cards along with the commission chart, the elf girl, Ilya, began registering the subjugation as accepted.

Not noticing the temperature of the girl’s smile abate somewhat, the group were roused about the commission’s subject.

“Pavel, isn’t this one even easier?”

“Oi oi, that rondébear we hunted the other day was

pretty high leveled y'know? Though even if there were a lot of them, it'd be an easy win. Right, Ilya-chan?"

Ilya looked at the commission chart. Similarly, so did Elivia and the others. The subjugation target was a laoloa boar. A huge wild boar that inhabited the laoloa continent's mountains. As the swordsman named Pavel said, the rondéville boar that lived near Rondéville had weakened abilities and constitutions.

Since they weren't doing any harm in particular, the subjugation amount of ten was probably to decrease their numbers in preparation for the oncoming harvest season.

As Ilya was thinking that looking at the group of men and women, she nodded without hesitating.

"That's right. So long as you bear in mind to not get surrounded, I expect you won't have any problems."

"See!"

"However, since their second breeding season has just finished, please make absolutely certain you avoid

chasing them too far. When they're protecting their young, even the non-aggressive ones will be driven into a frenzy."

"Ah, seriously...? Got it..."

The laoloa boar had the habit of chasing something indefinitely once enraged.

They didn't rebut her tone of certainty, instead not only embracing it as useful information but as reassuring advice.

Completing the registration while having such a conversation, Ilya presented their registration cards and the commission chart on the counter back to them.

The man with the bow turned his gaze towards Javier.

"So long as Javier-san watches our backs from the rear we'll be alright. Well then, please give my registration card back."

"Ah, right! Understood!"

Judging by the strength of his response after hearing his name called, Javier was all fired up.

The women in the surroundings, Katia and Elivia included, obviously shifted their focus to see what happened as usual. However, that wasn't all this time.

Since the person was Ilya, one couldn't help but to have a look of compassion. Still, this person was given looks of envy as they wanted to talk to her themselves.

"Please note that subjugation outside of the appropriate area does not count… Good luck."

When Ilya bowed as though she didn't mind the situation unfolding in front of her, Orlette, the swordswoman, dragged the man back by the nape of his neck.

"Yeah yeah. Cya later, Ilya. We're coming back to eat here when we finish the job!"

"I'll look forward to it, Orletta-san."

After watching the four exit, Ilya turned back towards the two people sitting at the counter.

"Are you ready to place your orders?"

"Ah, not yet."

Even though Ilya's eyes and hers met when she turned, she didn't seem to be fazed by being watched. Guessing that Ilya was aware of them watching her the entire time she was accepting the registration, Katia hung her head in shame. Elivia laughed in embarrassment.

"It's my first time seeing an elf, but it's true that they're worthy of being called beauties."

Even when complimented, Ilya almost didn't show any reaction at all.

Considering that she was in an occupation where there were many chances to meet people, it was easy to imagine that people would say things like that over and over again to someone like her. In truth, Ilya just accepted compliments as though they were for someone else since she knew what made her body when she reincarnated, but Elivia didn't know that.

(Maybe it seemed like flattery…)

As Elivia was regretting it just a bit while reflecting, Katia noticed her mumbling something.

“The staff here are polite… Elivia, can’t we make this our base for a while?”

“I really want to, but…”

Elivia looked at the bulletin board filled with commission charts.

Though there were subjugation commissions among the list of orders, they were all a ways away from Lunéville. They’d heard people in carriages say that Lunéville was peaceful on their way, but considering that they were doing jobs for the mercenary guild, the distance from the base to the area for the commissions were too far away.

“And so, it’s only fine if you take commissions with big rewards like those people earlier.”

“Ah… so that’s it…”

Muttering her consent, Elivia looked around the dining room.

The number of guests was unusually high, and much like the previous group of people, they stayed around to spend their incomes over and over.

Saying it another way, the only merit to do that is this town… or rather, this branch.

Taking that into consideration, Elivia turned and gave a wry smile to Ilya.

“Ah, umm… Ilya, was it? For a few reasons, we’ll be troubling you for a little while.”

“My name’s Katia. This one here is Elivia.”

“Katia-san and Elivia-san, is it? I’ll do my best to support you.”

After that, the two people forgot about their fatigue from travelling and lost track of time, talking with Ilya about various things.

Rumors like Orbwight Kingdom’s arena being closed due to racket about fixed matches or an ice dragon seen northeast Akradist Kingdom, things like that.

They talked about a wide range of things, but Ilya was a really good listener… up to the point the two girls came dangerously close to saying they were a Windia noble and a commissioned officer’s daughter.

The matter dealing with the arena was also a blunder for the guild. Though the information had also come to the branch, it was too late for etiquette by the time they had the opportunity to listen to the nation's side of the story, getting caught up in the moment was also one of the reasons.

One of the things Ilya had a particular interest in was the story concerning the ice dragon. Contrasting the disaster designated monster, the Tyrant Spider, that recently appeared near Lunéville, this was a calamity designated divine beast. Snow falling in the surroundings could be a matter of life and death for many people.

[Clairvoyance] [Mind Reading] [Eidetic Hearing] [Prophetic Dreams] [Star Memory]

If Ilya freely used those skills, she could be aware of the world's past, present, and future. They were difficult to use though.

If she said she knew things imprudently, she would be asked how she knew of them and doubted. After that, working would become difficult since it would put the

cart before the horse.

And so, Ilya decided to wait until she came across new information.

People visiting Lunéville, like Katia and Elivia, often bring gossip to hear.

(If people keep coming from the cities, it looks like we'll need to increase the size of the branch...)

While thinking about such a thing as that, Ilya fell asleep.

Part 2

Around the time that the people of Lunéville were falling asleep.

A figure wrapped in darkness ran in the forest to the west of Rondéville.

“Hah…!! Hah…!!”

The scorching pain in his throat was worsening, but his body needed air to keep coming.

Though he kept getting tripped up from his foot being caught by projecting tree roots and coiling weeds, he concentrated solely on running.

“Gaul! Stop!”

“-!?”

His name called out, the raccoon beastkin, Gaul, scowled at the owner of the voice.

Though there was a possibility they could lose their threat in the darkness, he couldn’t believe that he gave away their position willingly.

However, the birdkin youth Gaul was scowling at grabbed his shoulder, forcibly stopping him mid-step.

“Oi, are you sane!? Ruben! Run!”

“It’s alright! That guy isn’t coming anymore!”

“Eh…!?”

Looking around while breathing heavily, he saw an otter beastkin running over.

However, his speed was far from his top speed, if anything it was due to being more vigilant toward his surroundings.

“…Hah~”

Gaul sat down hard on the spot.

Catching up, the otter beastkin hung his head when he looked at the thing Gaul carried.

“The egg… this is all because we didn’t get rid of it…”

“W-we were able to get away somehow! It could have been more dangerous to throw it away!”

“How?”

Gaul groaned at the birdkin youth's, Ruben's, bitter grumble. The tense air faded the otter beastkin's bitter smile.

Their breathing in order, the three looked around, analyzing the their surroundings, collecting themselves.

"...Where are we?"

"I have no clue since we've been running all around... Ruben, can you fly?"

"Yeah. I've already recovered my magical power, I'll go."

Saying that, Ruben flew off clad in wind.

Normally, people needed to cast magic in order to fly. However, birdkin were able to achieve the same results as flight magic while omitting the chant.

While looking up at his friend flying around in the sky, Gaul asked his other friend a question.

"Teemo... did you see that strange horse?"

"...No."

In their minds was the image of a horned horse with what looked like scales instead of fur. The three of them had ran away because that horse attacked them.

“But, that didn’t seem like the egg’s parent… it chased Ruben and I as well.”

“…Well, horses don’t lay eggs to begin with.”

“It could’ve been a monster though.”

“A monster?”

Gaul tried to dismiss it as him being stupid, but recalled that the horse had been using magic.

Saying it was a monster since it used magic was surprising by itself, but it was more realistic than an ordinary animal using it.

“…Are monsters born from eggs?”

“No idea…”

The next moment, an unnatural sound reverberated through the air, cutting through the languid conversation

Scared, they sprung up and looked around. Then,

bang. The sound of something huge falling echoed through the air.

Stiffened by the sudden unexpected event, they realized what it could have been after a moment.

“” Ruben!? “”

They pushed their way through the grass to the origin of the sound.

“D-don’t come!!”

“” -!? “”

“That’s… blood!”

When Gaul looked at him in response to Teemo’s words, a figure was clinging to the birdkin’s body.

He couldn’t make out the figure’s identity. However, its arm extended awkwardly.

“Teemo!!”

“-!?”

Feeling he should push Teemo away first in order to ward it off, he felt a dull pain in his upper arm.

However, immediately following that was a sharp tearing pain in his upper arm, drowning everything else out.

“Aguah—!!”

“Dammit!!”

Red scattered… faster than he could see, its dagger was wet with blood. Gaul tried to draw his sword from his waist, but he couldn’t move.

Looking at his right arm for the first time, Gaul noticed a dagger sticking out of it.

“Gu-…!!”

Frigid pain running through his mind, Gaul broke out in a sweat.

Sinking to the ground due to terror and pain, he saw the black figure that had been standing behind Teemo right in front of him.

Fwoosh, the sound of air being sliced. Guessing that was brandishing its dagger that sliced through Teemo–

“Uwaaaaaah!!”

In order to defend himself, Gaul immediately proffered the egg held under his arm.

Then, there was a momentary pause.

The attack didn't come?

As soon as he thought that–

"Uwaaah!!"

"-!"

He heard a dull sound, the figure was blown away before his eyes.

Following the figure's path, he understood seeing Teemo covering the figure.

However, the binding didn't last long, it kicked off Teemo and tumbled.

"Gaul, quick!!"

Teemo immediately stood up and pulled Gaul's arm.

"Ruben too! Can you stand!?"

Ruben stirred slightly after hearing Teemo's voice.

But seeing that he couldn't stand, Teemo quickly

carried him on his back. During that time, his face tightened at his wounds but started running without caring.

“Idiot… bastard…!”

“I’m fine being an idiot!!”

Ruben gnashed his teeth at his friends’ excessive dialogue.

Then, he started thinking about their opponent while being carried.

At first he thought it was a bandit. However, with his throwing skills and not killing him when he was down, he didn’t think a simple bandit would use tactics like that to lure his comrades.

But if it wasn’t a simple bandit, why were they being targeted?

“…I think his target is this egg.”

Gaul interrupted Ruben’s train of thought.

Teemo was the one to answer.

“Definitely, when he, almost cut, the egg, he

panicked!”

“Then if we hand over the egg…”

“…That’s useless.”

Ruben interrupted Gaul.

“Useless!? Why!?”

“If the egg was his only purpose… don’t you think aiming at me, who was away from the egg, was strange…”

“Y-yeah…”

“But when the time comes, use it as a shield… Definitely don’t part with it…”

Saying up to there, Ruben thrust himself from Teemo’s back.

“Ruben!?”

“You’re burdens, sorry.”

With those words, Ruben reigned in his friends that were shouting in anger.

I’m sorry for you being burdens, but I’m even more

sorry for your deaths.

“It’s unfortunate, but I’ll be going ahead.”

When his body floated at that moment, they understood he used flying magic.

Something like him escaping by himself, neither Gaul nor Teemo thought that’s what he was doing.

“…Don’t die.”

“You too.”

“Absolutely, make it back alive…!”

However, as soon as Ruben took off into the sky, a dagger pierced his foot.

“Wh, at…!?”

The dagger was thrown from the direction they were running. Was there more than one enemy?

“Dammit…!!”

Drained of energy, he absolutely had to call for help.

Enduring the pain with sheer willpower, Ruben focused his magic.

While hearing the far away sounds of weapons hitting weapons, he cut through the sky like a blade.

Early the next morning. Due to the sound of intense knocking at her door, Ilya woke up.

“Wake up, Ilya!”

Equipping herself in a hurry, she called out to Ria on the other side of the door.

“What’s the matter?”

“An injured person! It’s serious!”

Among those who complete their requests or those who report their failures, there were naturally those who get injured during the mission.

Though the guild was obliged to have someone who could use recovery magic in each branch, their abilities were just to fulfill the requirements of first aid.

Therefore, in the case it didn’t stop with first aid treatment, they would have to get medical treatment at a hospital or a technique user of the church.

However, since Lunéville wasn't a major city like the royal capital, it didn't have a hospital. And due to the thieves guild from a little while ago, talks about building a Lottévester Faith church were at an impasse.

Inevitably, Ilya couldn't help but assist the critically injured cases.

"As usual, it's at the private room on the second floor."

"Got it!"

Without saying anything else, Ilya heard the sound of her running.

After she finished changing her clothes, Ilya descended the stairs from her private room and headed towards the closest stairway connecting the second and third floors.

Three people were lying in beds.

One male birdkin and two male beastkin. The birdkin's foot had started to become necrotic, but thankfully it hadn't been torn off.

(… Normal recovery magic should be fine.)

Checking the three men's injuries, Ilya determined so.

Though it was imprudent, she was prepared to use revival magic even if it caused others to become aware of a part of her cheat abilities. She was grateful for this miscalculation.

"Ria, please clear everyone out of here."

"Un, leave it to me!"

Entrusting it to her to usher everyone from the second floor's hallway and into the eatery, Ilya closed all of the room's curtains and concentrated on their treatment.

Taking down the [God King Barrier], she began the recovery magic's chant.

"—Light of recovery, sweep away the darkness of destruction—"

Interchangeable with the top ranked fire-type healing magic, 'Heal', it was the light-type healing magic–

"—Healing Light."

A mass of light appeared above Ilya's head, reacting to the bodies of the three people.

Light concentrated on the parts where they were wounded. The sphere of light disappearing before long and the light covering the three softened.

With not even a single scar able to be found in the places the light disappeared, the treatment ended successfully.

Putting off restoring their physical and mental wounds with recovery magic for now, Ilya went down to the first floor after putting the barrier back up to explain the situation.

"What did that…"

It was unusual for her to directly speak her thoughts.

"Ilya, did it go well!?"

"Ah, un. It's alright."

Not just Ria, but everyone gathered in the hall appeared relieved.

Usually, she would find so many people worrying

about strangers heartwarming, but right now she was far from thinking about that.

“That, there… how…?”

Following her gaze, it was the large egg about the size of a basketball.

Ria answered her question while stroking the egg.

“Ah, this egg? Those three from before brought it. I wonder if they were attacked by this thing’s parents while moving it…”

“That’s… I don’t think so…”

Due to her skill, she knew the egg’s name–[Egg of the Dragon God].

Who was the dragon god? It was the alias held by the ruler of the skies, a descendant of god with a dragon element. What was a divine beast that was a godlike beast? It itself was a special god, something ordinary humans couldn’t fight against.

Then, given the ability of those three from before, they would have easily been turned to cinders the moment

they tried to steal it.

Stifling a sigh that was about to come out at the evident trouble, Ilya turned to Ria.

“Those three’s registration cards?”

“I’ve held on to them. Here.”

“Thanks.”

That the three belonged to the mercenary guild was marked on them.

She saw that they had accepted a monster subjugation commission, as well as the amount of the stipulated amount to subjugation they’d achieved.

(They happened to just find the egg by chance… maybe?)

Though that was the greatest possibility, in that case, how did a dragon god that should have been in the Heaven Palace drop the egg? It was a complete mystery.

At any rate, although it was unfortunate for the three that carried it to the point they were injured, they

couldn't afford to sell off the egg.

(If things go poorly a city could perish. Ahaha…)

Now that she'd decided to deal with the egg, she noticed the gazes from those around her. Sensing they were waiting for her judgement, Ilya informed them.

"Postpone matters regarding the egg. Desiree-san."

"Yes~"

"The commission that the three registered for, could you look into it please?"

"Goooot it."

"Ria, since I'm going to wake Frank-san up, could you look after the egg for me?"

"Got it!"

Ilya immediately went up to the third floor, knocking on Frank's private room.

"Branch manager, please wake up."

The door opened before long with Frank appearing, not wearing his uniform and still afflicted by bedhead.

His appearance may have disillusioned a genuine girl, or maybe have made her heart throb, but with her previous life's memories she would never be perturbed by it.

"...What is it?"

"I need to consult something with you."

In order to explain the current circumstances with Frank, she opened her mouth.

Just then.

"Ilya—!"

Ria's shout echoed through the branch.

Apologizing to Frank, she immediately headed downstairs.

"What's wrong?"

Ria looked around in silence towards Ilya's question.

On the dragon god's egg.

Tiny cracks ran along the rainbow-reflecting oval-shaped egg.

It shook. Each time it did so, the cracks would extend and the shell would peel off little by little.

“Pi.”

“Hiii-!”

Surprised, Ria clung to Ilya.

Though she would have separated her from herself any other time, right now she didn’t have the composure to do so.

In order for eggs of named dragons to hatch, they needed to absorb the appropriate elements.

For flame dragons, the fire drake for example, the element was fire. For lightning dragons the elements were both fire and wind. There was a gigantic translucent stone called a crystal pillar for each elemental attribute. The dragon god’s eggs get the wind element from the Crystal Pillar of Wind in the Heavenly Palace floating in the sky. After that, the Heavenly Palace would absorb each of the other elements by floating around the world.

Towards dragons whose upper limits of magical power

were removed, having all attributes symbolized the power of the dragon god.

Consequently, though the dragon god's egg was finally hatching after absorbing enough elements of all attributes, there weren't any crystal pillars of any attribute near Lunéville either. Although fragments of crystal pillars exist everywhere as buildups of minerals, producing and releasing elements from those buildups wasn't as effective.

That's why Ilya couldn't make light of the egg hatching.

(The main cause its absorbing elements… main cause?)

While thinking, she came up with a possibility.

"Sorry Ria, I need to return to my room for a moment."

"D-don't go, Ilya!"

"It's alright. It's a dragon's egg, not a monster's. You won't suddenly be attacked, unless maybe its parents see you and misunderstand."

Several people became restless at the mention of parent dragons.

Many flying dragons and land dragons accompanied animal trainers, so people were relatively familiar with them. Let alone the hatchlings, not many people feared them. Still, being accompanied by dragons other than flying dragons and land dragons was difficult, requiring more power to obtain and was held in prestige.

(Only since it'll be troublesome this time, I should probably stop it.)

In order to prevent confusion, she didn't speak her thoughts. Having now returned to her room, Ilya suddenly threw open the window.

Then, she looked towards the sky and used [Clairvoyance].

However, she didn't see the Heavenly Palace's landmark or a mass of cumulonimbus clouds at Rondéville.

Continuing to look search after that, she found the

Heavenly Palace about four countries away in the skies above Tekyareru Desert. She thought that the cause of it hatching was due to the Heavenly Palace or cumulonimbus clouds, but it appeared her guess was off.

Now that it came to that, the possibility of failure appeared. For hatchlings that couldn't absorb enough elements, their abilities would stop growing midway.

If its child suffered misfortune due to others, the dragon god would naturally be in a rage.

(I wonder if it can be stopped without killing it… No, it's no good to abandon hope.)

It might have already absorbed enough elements.

However, when her eyes looked at the egg with [Clairvoyance] again, there was something strange.

The [Presence Isolation] skill was used. Two figures were secretly hiding by the building.

Her eyes saw the [Assassin] in their occupation columns.

(It'd be fine if it turned out to not be something troublesome, but…)

As she headed down to the first floor while clinging to a shred of hope–

"Pi."

There was a hatchling dragon with blue eyes and a pure white body when she returned.

The current dragon god that Ilya knew had jet black horns on its scarlet body, and since the dragon had deep blue eyes, she couldn't see any similarities. However, it was clearly described in the occupation column as the dragon god's child with a status that slightly surpassed other dragons.

"Ah, Ilya."

The hatchling, being gently patted by Ria, turned to face her at the same time.

Then, an unexpected situation for her happened.

"Pi!"

"Ah."

“Eh?”

The hatchling dragon totteringly ran, jumping into Ilya’s chest.

Standing still so that she wouldn’t avoid it, she caught the hatchling head-on.

It was a confusing turn of events, but the hatchling snuggled up to her with its whole body. Its underdeveloped scales were smooth.

(Its tongue is quite rough… wait, don't lick me!)

Watching the pleasant scene, Ria spoke to Ilya.

"Looks like you were just imprinted by a dragon's child."

"No way something like that…"

Dragons had the trait to imprint their parents. Not from the dragon god, but she heard that information from other dragons. Though she expected it to judge Ria as its parent, it appeared that it didn't imprint on her.

(… Is it because of the dragon element?)

Since she possessed a higher rank of the dragon element than the dragon god, the hatchling probably mistook her for a comrade.

Ilya, who inclined her head while thinking so, was mimicked by the hatchling that also inclined its head.

The surroundings were wrapped in a gentle atmosphere.

“Ilya… you’ve settled down.”

“Oh?”

You could say that, thought Ilya.

Most things no longer surprised her since traveling throughout the world, and except being surprised at seeing insects she would never be flustered. Above all, although this time was certainly something unexpected, the hatchling hatched safely. She found that even its current status was stronger than the weaker species of dragons.

With its initial level and amount of skills, as well as having good latent potential, it wasn’t underdeveloped at all. Its potential seemed to be even better than its parent’s.

(The dragon god should be satisfied with this! That’s good, good.)

With that, the immediate problem could be avoided.

While stroking the curled up hatchling in her arms, she addressed the hatchling that lifted its head.

“How about a meal for now?”

Part 3

Ilya returned to her room on the third floor, taking down the barrier.

Dragons ate pure magic, that is, magical power.

There were two ways to send it magical power. The first way was to mix magical power with body fluids like blood (this is what dragon's milk does), the second was to apply it with support magic.

Though she would immediately recover when wounded, Ilya didn't like seeing blood so she chose the latter.

"—Red spirits of power, rage from the abyss. Sharpen what is hard, deepen what is soft. Give power to this person—"

Physical ability (brute strength, leg strength, and explosive strength's overall value) were strengthened by this fire-type support magic.

"—Reinforce."

“Pi!?”

Fed magical power from Ilya, the hatchling’s body completely filled with magical power. Then, the elements inside the hatchling’s body interfered with the magic.

(Nn? … Ah, I see.)

Ilya had completely forgotten.

The cause for the hatchling to hatch. It was—

(Probably because I used the healing magic Healing Light.)

The amount of elements collected due to Healing Light was probably enough for the hatchling to have absorbed.

Still, the Tekyrareru Desert that the Heavenly Palace drifted to was where the Crystal Pillar of Fire was. Guessing by that, the Heavenly Palace likely went there to absorb elements of fire.

“Kepu—”

The hatchling, unable to continue eating the magical

power, stopped and leaned against her. Just then, there was a knock at her door.

“Ilya, are you good for a moment?”

“Ah, branch manager. By all means.”

Restoring her barrier and opening the door, she invited Frank inside.

“I roughly heard about it from Ria… It really is a dragon’s child.”

“Though it’s hard to talk about, there’s something I need to tell you.”

“I don’t mind.”

“This child is the dragon god’s offspring.”

“…”

(Ah, he’s holding his head.)

Understanding the situation the branch was in from those few words, his intelligence became his enemy.

Ilya decided to wait for him to settle down by stroking the hatchling, but it didn’t take him much time to

recover.

"...You're certain?"

"Yes. One hundred percent."

"I see... What should we do?"

Hmm, she gave a gesture as though she were thinking.

Should she go to the dragon god's Heavenly Palace and return it after all? There was only two ways to get there though.

The first would be to fly there with wind-type magic, another would be to borrow the strength of summoners or animal trainers.

If it were the latter she'd have no choice but to hold a ritual at the dragon king's shrine. Since performing the ritual at the shrine was originally to beg for rain, it wouldn't give a good impression for the dragon god. In that case— "There's no choice but to go and return it."

"Put out a commission as the guild?"

"That's right... I'd want the people who found it to bring it there since they are the ones responsible,

but…”

“They’re still unconscious, huh.”

“Yes. There’s also the possibility that they brought it without knowing it was the dragon god’s egg, too. I can’t say anything without hearing their side of the story.”

While they were having a serious conversation, the hatchling snuggled up to her while playing with its tail. Attempting to set it down, she leaned forward, but it gripped her firmly and wouldn’t let go.

“…It looks like it’s a good idea to leave the problem of taking care of the child to Ilya.”

“…It seems that way. I understand.”

When she gently stroked its head, it narrowed its eyes in comfort.

Ilya stared outside the window, letting out a single sigh.

A horse was dancing in the air, with scale-like fur and a single heroic horn.

In order to take care of the hatchling, Ilya was temporarily exempted from reception and kitchen duties.

(… Ah, what a pure-white working environment.)

Though Ilya was impressed by the fact she was given leave for child-care, she braced herself and opened the door to the office.

In order to avoid excessive risks, she avoided falling behind on developments.

Desiree called out to her before Ilya even asked.

“Ah, Ilya-chan. I figured out where those three accepted the commission.”

“Thank you very much. As expected of Desiree-san. You work quickly.”

“I’m happy to be praised by Ilya-chan. Well, those three accepted the commission from the Shivarémis branch. The town to the southeast of Filéamis.”

“Do you know who the client was?”

“Of course. The commission was issued by someone

from the trade guild in the Shivarémis branch. The contents of the commission was a Filéahound in the forest to the east of Shivarémis."

Speaking of the forest to the east of Shivarémis, it was famous for cultivating its heat resistant special product, oranges. It was no wonder that the trade guild sent out a commission to protect their product ahead of the stingy agriculture guild.

What Ilya thought incomprehensible was why those three purposely went to Lunéville with that commission.

(... In the end, there's no progress to be made without speaking to the people in question, huh?)

"Pi~..."

Turning her gaze to the tiny voice, the hatchling's legs were paddling in the air.

(Sleeping?)

Holding the hatchling in her arms, Ilya bowed her head to Desiree.

“Desiree-san, thank you for helping me with your precious time.”

“No, no. I’m willing to help you whenever.”

Though Ilya’s hierarchical relationship to her in the workplace was lower, Desiree didn’t appear to care about such things as she waved her hands. Ilya let out a sigh for her workplace that was filled with such tolerant people, returning to her room on the third floor.

As she was gently brushing the hatchling laid on the bed, a knock sounded at the door. Considering the speed and strength of the knocks, she guessed it wasn’t anything urgent.

In fact, she didn’t see anything like impatience or discomfort in Elizah’s expression when she opened the door at like.

“Ilya, they’re waking up.”

“Un, I understand. I’ll be there soon.”

Standing up while holding the hatchling in her arms, she bent down to let it onto the bed. However, the

hatchling still held on, absolutely refusing to separate from Ilya.

Reluctantly heading to the private room on the second floor while holding the hatchling, the otter beastkin was the only one awake.

When Ilya entered the room and bowed once, Frank immediately started the questioning.

“Do you hurt anywhere?”

“…No… where is—”

“This is Lunéville.”

“Lunéville…?”

The beastkin knit his brows in puzzlement.

“Aren’t you the one that came here?”

“Yes, I… r-right! Gaul and Ruben!?”

The otter beastkin, Teemo, raised his body in order to jump up.

“Please be at ease. Their wounds have also been healed. They’re just resting right now.”

“Is that… so… Thank you.”

His strength left him when he heard they were safe. Frank shook his head towards Teemo bowing his head deeply.

“Don’t worry about it. I want to hear something apart from that. Where did you obtain the dragon egg?”

“Dragon…? That was a dragon egg!?”

Teemo’s eyes widened in surprise.

“Did you move it without realizing?”

Teemo hesitatingly nodded towards Frank’s somewhat puzzled question.

“…Yeah… After finding it, we were going to try and return to Willville to complete the commission. Since it was an egg we hadn’t seen before, we thought it might get bought at a high price.”

“What was its surroundings like?”

“Surroundings, huh…?”

Teemo kept his mouth shut as he thought for Ilya’s question.

Since he was overthinking it, she helped him out.

“Something like where the egg fell on the ground, the weather… anything that you can remember.”

“…The area, I don’t think there was anything in particular about it… ah, no, since it fell in a place that didn’t look like a nest, we thought it was strange. As for the weather… sunny, no, maybe a little cloudy…”

“That’s enough. Thank you for the help.”

When Ilya bowed her head, Frank resumed his questioning.

“It might be painful to remember… but were you attacked after that?”

“Yeah…”

“Did you see what it looked like?”

“Yes. It was a horse that grew a horn. Its fur was distinctive… it looked like scales.”

Teemo’s words troubled Ilya, but she didn’t act on it since she was holding the hatchling.

A horse that had scales and a horn could only be a

Qilin. Note 2)

(What is it doing in a place like this.)

She knew one was in the skies above Rondéville, but she thought it was here to look for the hatchling. However, hearing Teemo's story, there were many contradictions.

"Did the horse do this to all of you?"

She continued to listen in.

"No. Though it chased us, we were able to escape while barely dodging its attacks. We got injured after that."

"Were you attacked by another horse?"

"No… it was a person."

Frank's tension increased. If someone was aiming for the egg, that person was probably trying to anger the dragon god. Being stressed was natural.

"Did you see the person?"

"…No, it was a surprise attack, so I couldn't see much."

“…You did well to not lose the egg.”

“That’s because we barely understood that the enemy avoided attacking the egg…”

Taking advantage of their opponent’s intentions, they successfully lead the attacks. Making such a wise decision in a situation of life and death, Ilya sincerely admired them.

“After that, we were only able to run towards the walls we saw…”

“Is that so. You worked hard.”

Though Frank sent a glance to Ilya as he replied to him, she had nothing, returning him a nod filled with meaning.

“Sorry you had to wake up so soon. Take care of yourself.”

“Ah, yeah… Really, thank you so much.”

“No, you’re the one to thank. Defending the dragon god’s egg, I give you my heartfelt gratitude.”

Hearing that it was the dragon god’s egg, Teemo’s face

paled.

Even if they didn't want to be involved in something so awe-inspiring, it was decent consideration.

If the three people were thinking about the egg's protection, they likely would have conveyed their intentions first.

Even so, a respectable person wouldn't have released the egg and place themselves above all else.

(I don't know if it's too sudden… but with those three attacked, maybe I should think about its goal?)

Ilya sorted through the information they'd just gained.

"Take care of yourself."

"Pi."

The hatchling made a sound along with Ilya's bow.

Not that the hatchling understood it had received his protection. However, thinking that the hatchling gave its thanks, even though Teemo was embarrassed he felt his mood lighten up.

Meanwhile, Frank and Ilya left the room and moved to

the parlor on the third floor.

“It looks like we escaped the worst-case scenario.”

“It does, doesn’t it.”

Ilya gave Frank’s weighty murmur the affirmative. What would the worst-case scenario have been? The dragon god’s anger mercilessly befalling upon everyone.

“What are your thoughts.”

“It might take a little while. I’ll prepare some tea.”

“Ah, alright.”

Her leisurely behavior helped to ease Frank’s tension.

As for Ilya, it was neither resignation nor bravado that she was taking her time. She knew that it wouldn’t help to rush.

Pouring the tea from the teapot into a cup, she placed it on a saucer and passed it to Frank.

Seeing Frank settle down from smelling its fragrance, Ilya began explaining.

“Does branch manager know where the dragon god lives?”

“No, I don’t.”

“The dragon god lives on an island that floats in the sky, called the Heavenly Palace.”

“An island that floats…?”

“In the center of the island is a gigantic Crystal Pillar of Wind.”

That the crystal pillar fell and was stolen, with Ilya becoming a wife candidate for the dragon god when she retrieved it for her deed… she left that out, continuing to speak without adding such a superfluous thing.

“So, my first thought was that the egg fell from the Heavenly Palace.”

“Then how did the egg end up safe? … Ah, did you hear about the area?”

“Yes. Even if some power came into play, I don’t believe it would be able to land safely without exerting

some influence on the surroundings."

Even if it didn't make a crater, something similar should have happened. Still, the possibility that the Heavenly Palace was related after hearing about the weather was low.

"When the Heavenly Palace is in the sky overhead, it just looks like a huge rain cloud from the outside and can't be seen. It's not weather that could be mistaken for sunny or cloudy."

"Then there's no possibility that it fell…"

"Correct. It's likely that it was carried to that ground.

Thus, Ilya had an idea of who the perpetrator was.

"Why would they bring the egg to the ground?"

"Though I don't know why, at the very least I don't think it holds any ill intent towards the egg."

"Why?"

"Though they mentioned a horned horse with scales, that horse is called a qilin."

"Keerin…?"

“Yes. It’s called a mythical beast, the dragon god’s kin.”

What was a mythical beast? The kin of a god. Their existences weren’t entirely confirmed and though they were generally descendants of gods like the dragon god and Demon God, they sometimes resulted from crossbreeding between difference species.

As for the qilin, it was the child produced from breeding between the dragon god and a horse beastkin. Possessing the same horn and scales as a dragon and a lot of magical power due to its dragon element, its appearance was similar to the dragon god and beastkin.

“Due to it having a benevolent disposition, so long as it doesn’t get driven into a dangerous situation, it will not try to harm others. Rather, it would sooner hurt itself than injure an enemy.”

“Then why were they attacked by a mythical beast like that?”

“It was probably just pretending to attack.”

Frank’s expression was saying he didn’t understand.

However, seeming to realize it by himself immediately after, his brows furrowed deeply.

"…Why in Lunéville…"

Not even Ilya knew if it guided it here. No, it was more correct to say that she didn't want to know.

Surely the dragon god didn't want an outsider like Ilya to raise his child. She didn't want to think he was the same as that water dragon.

"However, who were those people that attacked them afterwards…?"

"I don't know. However, I'm certain that they were acting on different intentions than the qilin."

There was the possibility it was bringing the egg to Lunéville in order for Ilya to protect the egg from its enemies as well.

However, in that case, why was the egg taken away from the Heavenly Palace in the first place? She couldn't understand its motives. Did something happen in the Heavenly Palace?

Considering how the dragon god doted on the qilin and his other kin, she didn't think the dragon god would be disgusted at the hatchling. But considering that there could be enemies inside the Heavenly Palace, the dragon god wouldn't leave something like that alone.

(… Not enough information as expected, then?)

With her current information, she couldn't determine the truth.

"In any case, if we assume the qilin purposely brought it to the ground, we can't just return it to the Heavenly Palace."

"Right. It'd be easy if we could get the truth from the qilin and the people who attacked them though."

"It won't go so well as that huh?"

"But, maybe we will manage to before long."

"Is that so? … Got it. Is there anything I can do to help?"

"Well…"

Ilya thought for a moment for Frank's offer.

"This evening, is Rachelle taking the reception desk?"

“Yeah, she is.”

“Then, could you tell her to bring a meal here in the evening? I almost certainly won’t be able to go anywhere at that time since I’ll be looking after the hatchling.”

“That’s all?”

“Yes.”

Nodding while gently petting the hatchling, she was stared at by its clear blue eyes. The stifling atmosphere was swept away when the hatchling rolled about, causing Ilya to smile.

“Well then, how about going for a walk?”

“Pi!”

Still acting in an easygoing manner, Ilya bowed to Frank, still drained of energy from the situation, before walking out of the branch with the hatchling.

[Hunt the horse with the mentioned features in that area and seize its egg. Eliminate anyone who knows of the egg’s existence without exception.]

Those were the instructions they'd received this time.

Though finding that horse with the information from the suspicious man that called himself Catoh was going well, the wind changed when they encountered a human man on the way.

That's because in the next moment, that man transformed into a yellow-scaled sea snake with a single horn and attacked them.

Though its powerful body and water magic made it a close fight, its enemies successfully gave it the slip. However, being unable to find Catoh, it would take them time to find the egg again.

When they finally found the egg, instead of seeing the horse in its surroundings there were instead three beastkin.

Surmising the three's strength, they judged it wouldn't be a hindrance to their mission.

In fact, they held the advantage of their combat potential increasing in the darkness and by decentralizing their forces. Handling it the same way

they'd used for their assassinations until now, they quietly and quickly moved in to handle their targets.

However, there was one thing different from their normal orders this time.

That was the egg. They were not to harm it.

They were unaccustomed to the constraint of not being able to break it. As a result, they weren't able to kill the three people.

Therefore, they were now in front of the guild association's Lunéville branch.

"Bard, there."

The youth named Bard looked to where the beastkin woman pointed.

Looking ahead, a dragon hatchling was tottering in front of a girl.

With the information they'd procured beforehand, considering its unusually white skin, there was no mistaking that it came from the egg.

However, Bard's gaze wasn't on the hatchling. It was

glued to the girl walking.

"—…!"

It was suspicious to continue watching someone. Thinking that as he forcibly stopped looking at her, he realized that sweat was beading on his back.

"…Bard, what's wrong?"

"…It's nothing."

Right. It was nothing.

Though those three from before were likely stronger than him, with his area of expertise… it wasn't a problem to go for assassinations.

Then what did he sense just now?

Was he fascinated by her beauty?

He denied the possibility, thinking it ridiculous. A human that had such upright emotions had no place on being something like an assassin.

"What do we do?"

Bard switched his train of thought to the problem at

hand at her question.

Even if they did nothing else, they had to fulfill their orders. Seize the egg, kill anyone involved, that's all. If the intelligence about the egg hatching turned out true, they would already be unable to achieve their goals, but they would at least seize the hatchling and take it back.

"...First, we need to investigate whether or not that hatchling came from the egg."

"Got it."

His partner readily accepting it, Bard exhaled slightly.

"Katie, you go back to the branch and keep watch for if that elf returns with the dragon hatchling."

"Got it. And you?"

"I'll be gathering more information from around town."

"Got it."

Since becoming his partner, Katie had never second guessed Bard's decisions.

Rather than leaving the decision-making to him, it was more like she abandoned making decisions entirely.

With a facial expression lacking any emotions, she gave up thinking. When he met her, she was already like that.

"…Tch."

Clicking his tongue in irritation, he proceeded to walk through Lunéville.

After finishing his investigations, Bard reunited with Katie.

Though it was called an investigation, with Bard's sociable disposition, he just listened to residents' conversations while walking through the town.

Putting together the stories he'd heard, the hatchling had hatched from the egg as expected. Currently, that elf girl had become the hatchling's parent.

"How'd it go?"

"The child elf returned with the hatchling."

"Got it. Let's head into the branch."

Of course, their objective wasn't to get something to eat.

It was to find out where the hatchling usually rested if things went well.

However, Bird thought that even if it didn't go so perfectly, it would still be helpful to reference with the information he'd gained from the town.

You could only trust things you see with your own eyes, after all. That was the rule he'd learned from living this long.

"Welcome."

The voice of girls reached their ears.

After roughly surveying the first floor, he saw neither the elf girl nor the hatchling. While wondering if he'd chosen to look in the wrong place, two beastkin girls approached them.

"Are you here for a meal?"

"Yeah."

A black panther beastkin and a black cat beastkin.

Not changing their expressions at the curt response, the beastkin girls showed the two to open seats at the counter.

Though he didn't want the staff to remember his face, it would have stood out to reject.

Sitting down obediently, he appropriately ordered a meal from the menu.

Bard asked for what caught his eyes, while Katie just asked for the same thing. Katie's expression didn't change when she looked at the menu, nor when the dishes arrived.

However, when she put the food in her mouth—

"So good…"

She smiled slightly. Bard definitely saw it happen.

His mind slowed by the surprise, he was unable to come up with anything good to say in response. Eventually—

"…Is that so?"

Just that. Holding back his irritation at such an

uncontrolled situation, Bard dipped his spoon into the dish, bringing some to his mouth.

"...It's good."

Not even realizing he said anything, the two just continued to silently eat their food.

But he never forgot about his mission.

He continued to listen to conversations. They ended up being of little importance and followed along with what he'd heard outside, though.

Just when he began to think it was useless and give up, that man appeared.

"Rachelle."

"Ah, Frank-san. Good morning."

Frank Deshan.

Lunéville branch's branch manager, a specialist in close combat. Also excelling in insight and leadership, he was added to the list of characters to be wary of by the organization. His pressuring atmosphere and stable center of gravity testified to his ability.

Probably due to his instinctive vigilance, he spontaneously became aware of Frank and focused on him.

If he was there, they needed to hurriedly secure the hatchling.

Though Bard was thinking that—

“Did you hear? Ilya is completely taken up by a hatchling~”

“…Yeah.”

“Well, that was pretty indifferent~. It’s no fun if you don’t give more of a reaction you know~”

“I’m not a toy.”

Watching him tease the receptionist who had a cramped expression, he didn’t think that was a person they needed to be vigilant of.

“Anyway, Rachelle. Ilya seems to be tied up by taking care of the hatchling, so please bring a meal to her room.”

“Eh? Me? I’m fine with it but…”

“Ilya nominated you. In the meantime, I’ll fill in.”

Rachelle sighed.

“Frank-san, I think Ilya pushed you away.”

“Uu…”

She struck a nerve. He was at a loss for words.

“Well, Ilya is strangely serious though, so she might just want to keep the pecking order clear.”

“…”

“A little lonely, isn’t it?”

Rachelle left the reception counter behind with those words.

Frank and the remaining receptionist were left wrapped in a mood difficult to speak in.

“I think she didn’t want you to do it because she didn’t trust you in her room…”

“Clarice… that’s…”

“What Rachelle said, didn’t it make some sense?”

“…I know…”

With that, the two people at the counter stopped their idle talk and handled their reception duties.

As for Bard, he wasn’t interested in the internal relationships in the branch at all. However, it became

clear that the hatchling was being sheltered in the branch. Referring to a rough sketch of the inside of the branch, his target would be on the third floor.

Judging by the staffs' conversation, Frank wouldn't be in Ilya's room.

"Tonight, we sneak in."

Exiting the branch, Bard informed Katie so.

Part 4

Though they were accustomed to infiltrating buildings, there was something they found hard to deal with.

That was barrier magic. Currently, the branch's windows and doors were sealed off with barriers.

In order to break a barrier, one needed to use the corresponding counterspell to the magic used, otherwise you'd have no choice but to simply brute force it by pummeling it with magic.

However, both of those methods were impossible to them as neither were magicians.

(Should we look for another way in…?)

Though Bard's thoughts were tinged with irritation, he noticed a single window open while looking around the outside of the branch. It was a hole in the barrier. If they used that, they could get in.

(…)

However, Bard hesitated.

The person of the branch put such a strong barrier up. Would they make that kind of a mistake?

Be that as it may, there was no guarantee they'd find another hole the next day. Something like waiting for another window to be open was out of the question.

The hatchling wouldn't necessarily be in Lunéville indefinitely.

After his slight hesitation, Bard whispered into Katie's ear.

They were currently wearing masks that only exposed their eyes while they were sneaking in, so they couldn't communicate with each other without getting close to each other.

"I'll sneak in alone. Stand by at the rendezvous."

"...Why?"

Bard was at a loss for words since she didn't acknowledge it.

"There is the possibility of this being a trap. You will

erase all traces of me."

"...Still, more people is better."

"Wha—..."

She was being obstinate.

"...If I'm a nuisance, I'm fine even being a decoy."

"Tha—...!"

That won't happen, is what he wanted to shout, but he pushed it back down.

Bard hadn't thought of a way to argue with Katie, who had never refuted him until now.

"...Got it."

Erasing all traces of his breathing, Bard climbed the wall first and successfully invaded through the window. Then Katie followed up.

However, the two people who invaded the room gasped.

Because their objective, the hatchling, was sleeping soundly in that room.

More important than that, however, was the thing that completely captivated their sight. The elf girl that was sleeping while holding the hatchling.

The elf girl's sleeping appearance held a mystique that seemed as though it would disappear as soon as it were touched and held a beauty where not even the smallest distortion was permitted.

They were professional assassins that could kill their emotions, but they might have still been standing there all the way to morning.

Somehow, Bard managed to restore his consciousness and kill his mind and emotions, reaching for the knife at his waist.

Telling Katie to be vigilant of their surroundings with his eyes, he once again turned towards the elf girl.

Without even noticing the sweat running down his face and back, he swung the knife straight for the girl's neck.

"—!?"

However, the point of the knife that was swung

directly downwards and could even pierce a wall.

It touched her skin. But it couldn't cut it.

Bard raised the knife perplexed, swinging it down towards the girl's profile for the second time.

However, let alone her skin, even her hair that seemed like it would disappear by a touch couldn't be cut.

—What is this?

Confused by something that had never happened in all of his experience, Bard retreated a step back.

At that instant.

"—!"

As Katie began running towards the door, it was forcibly opened.

She wasn't so stupid as to collide with an opening door.

However, Bard saw Katie fly back and slam into the windowsill.

(Damn...!)

Looking back at the door, Bard shifted his body as he

felt a shiver run down his spine from a piercing blood lust.

Immediately following that, a hammer-like fist scraped by Bard's cheek.

It was merely a coincidence that he avoided it at the last second due to the shivers.

However, if he took advantage of fighting in close combat in the dark, he would be slightly superior.

The moment he instantly determined such a thing and attempted to hold up his knife, Bard suddenly lost the ability to move as a ballistic shock ran through his skull originating from his stomach.

(Imp… po… ssi…)

He had definitely avoided the attack from that left arm.

However, what he saw in his fading consciousness was the figure of a man slowly pulling back his left arm.

Bard became aware that he was bound. Though he tried to struggle, his body wouldn't listen to him.

Additionally, the pain in his abdomen was almost enough to cause him to vomit.

“Kuh…!”

When Bard groaned, the bulge on the bed stirred.

Slowly getting up, the elf girl didn’t show any reaction in particular even when she saw Bard.

His body shuddered in fear from her gaze that looked as though she knew everything.

Looking away from him as though he were nothing, the elf girl, Ilya, looked towards Frank who’d bound them.

“…I didn’t think they’d show themselves on the first day.”

“There’s a limit to being so carefree!”

With a direct fighting spirit that was completely different from his appearance at the reception desk, his words were sharp. Above all, the gauntlets on his hands stuck out against his uniform.

Next to Bard, Katie had completely lost consciousness.

Seeing the two people restrained, Ilya bowed to Frank.

“My apologies, branch manager. You’ve had to sully your hands.”

Expressing gratitude as though he’d just disposed of an insect that came in, she thanked him for having to deal with it. That was how Bard saw Ilya when she said that.

She was entirely out of the norm. An existence that he could never be a match for.

“S-stay away, you monster…!”

“Please keep quiet. Ah, biting your tongue or drinking poison is useless by the way. I’ll absolutely heal you. Everyone you people attacked are safe as well. Will you believe me with this?”

The beastkin they’d attacked were safe.

They didn’t have any intelligence that said that. If people who suffered fatal wounds were healed, it should have been a topic of discussion. However, he wasn’t confident in the denial that came to his mind.

The reason that the recovery of those dying beastkin didn't come up as a topic could only be because it wasn't uncommon for this town.

They didn't die. There was no way to kill them.

In that case, he had no choice but to defeat them and run away.

But could he?

It was impossible.

He had no way to handle his current situation.

(... It's useless.)

Bard lost his will to resist.

"That calmness... Ilya, were you planning on being a decoy from the start?"

"Ah, yeah. Though I never would have thought that they'd appear on the first day..."

She made sure they knew the hatchling was in Lunéville by walking the around town.

To show that the hatchling was in her room, Ilya sent

the message to Rachelle. The window being left open was of course, also on purpose.

Though Frank understood that now, he didn't agree with it.

"If I weren't on alert, what would you have done?"

Of course, I would have captured them.

(Though… this isn't the time to say that…)

Frank didn't know about Ilya's abilities. Seeing Ilya look troubled, Frank sighed, switching the subject.

"I'll bring these two to the basement. Ilya, wait in the parlor."

"…Alright."

Ilya had no choice but to obediently nod at Frank's tone of not accepting a refusal.

"…Pi?"

Likely woken by the turmoil, the hatchling raised its head while half asleep.

As Ilya was lulling the hatchling to sleep once again,

Frank told her to would wait in the parlor after after changing.

“I said I wouldn’t ask about things relating to your abilities when I hired you so long as you did your job, but I can’t overlook this. Why didn’t you tell me?”

“In order to deceive your enemies, don’t tell your allies…”

“I understand the meaning of preventing them from finding out, but you didn’t need to include me in your precautions.”

Once Frank confined the intruders inside one of the underground storehouses, he immediately turned back to the parlor and scolded Ilya.

Frank himself didn’t realize he changed his phrasing to be about himself.

That was the degree of his anger, but he was also concerned.

“I’m sorry… I’ll be more careful from now on.”

“…You’ll never act as a decoy again right?”

“Yeah.”

Believing Ilya’s response to be her true feelings, Frank breathed out a large sigh.

When Ilya looked up after feeling that the mood changed, Frank’s expression returned to what one would normally have after dealing with an insect.

“Those two appear to belong to the thieves guild.”

Ilya checked the outstretched registration cards.

“I’ll be interrogating them after this, but is there anything you want to hear?”

“Eh? By yourself… no, it’s nothing.”

Frank would try to get information from them even if he had to use his hands. Noticing that he didn’t want to show her him carrying out a cruel interrogation, Ilya stopped speaking.

(You don’t need to worry about me…)

Though her thoughts were true in various ways, she wouldn’t let the opportunity pass.

“Then, just one thing. I want to ask, rather, I request this of branch manager.”

“It’s Frank.”

“Eh?”

“I’m fine with Frank. Otherwise you might keep on with the formalities forever.”

Rather than Ilya standing on formalities, it was a habit left over from the characteristics of the vertically structured society from her previous life.

Though she herself was aware of it, it was difficult to explain since it involved her previous life.

(… With how things are going right now, seems like it’d useless no matter what I say.)

Though Ilya was a little reluctant to refer to her boss so familiarly, Ilya decided to switch her thinking.

“I understand. I’m requesting Frank-san for this, but I want to propose a commission to those two.”

“…What?”

“To disclose all of the information they have regarding

the dragon god's egg. By confessing what they have from their guild, couldn't we treat them as our spies for the thieves guild? Of course, they would continue to belong to the thieves guild."

Double agents, so to speak.

The thieves guild utilized a system of independent guild members in various places directly contacting its headquarters. While the structure of its vertical connections were strong, its drawback was that horizontal connections were weak. It was difficult to notice if someone double crossed them.

Fearing that, the thieves guild brainwashed members in their own educational institution, but that wasn't a problem for Ilya. An eye for an eye. Mental interference for mental interference. If they were brainwashed, her plan was that she just needed to undo the brainwashing.

However, not knowing Ilya's abilities, Frank couldn't agree to Ilya's plan so easily.

"…You want me to turn a blind eye to them?"

“No. Their achievement reward would be to put carrying out their punishments on hold, that is suitable compensation. Since if the dragon god’s anger isn’t settled, we’ll hand them over first and foremost.”

Then, Ilya suddenly realized something.

Seeing that they’d just learned about it, she completely overlooked one thing.

“Those people might not know that egg was the dragon god’s egg either.”

“Are you… sure it’s like that?”

“Yes. Their superiors think of them as sacrificial pawns, or rather just as tools to acquire things.”

Though some would equivocate, Ilya could declare that every person in their management was like that.

Not just the management but also the ones she’d beat up after meeting before, the information she’d received from people who promised to revolutionize the thieves guild supported that belief.

“Please don’t leave me out of the loop regarding the

dragon god's egg."

"Alright."

Frank stood up, stopping his hand on the door.

"You should get some rest soon. Even if it didn't wake up from all of that trouble, it'll definitely be lonely if the owner of that boldness isn't there."

Wondering if it became a trauma, Ilya smiled as see saw Frank rub his stomach.

Although she remembered being at a loss with her baby younger sister in her previous life, she didn't think the dragon hatchling was a handful at all.

It slept well, it didn't cry at night, and it didn't throw tantrums.

(Its so cute too.)

With that fleeting thought, Ilya remembered that she was defending herself with a barrier, saying nothing and smiling wryly.

Afternoon the following day.

The scent of tea brewed by Frank spread through the parlor, Ilya and Frank faced each other.

“They knew it was a dragon’s egg, but didn’t seem to know it was the dragon god’s.”

“Is that so…”

“Even so, I believe they’d heard about the dragon god. I got the commission they received this morning.”

“That’s good.”

Ilya had considered using her [Mind Reading] skill if he couldn’t get information out of them, so she was relieved knowing that it wasn’t necessary.

The [Mind Reading] skill, the kind of thing that would backfire, was improved by her cheat-like abilities. Let alone reading surface thoughts, it could delve into their deep psyche, going so far as to read even their memories. Since it would result in their sense of self collapsing, it was equivalent to suicide.

Besides, although Ilya could remove her barrier to unleash the charming effect, it would completely deprive them of free will and turn them into servants.

As far as she was concerned, that was an abominable method.

Understanding that Ilya was put at ease, Frank continued speaking.

“The commission they received was to take back a dragon egg a monster horse had robbed, eliminating anyone related to the egg. They had initially chased after the monster horse as per their commission, it appears they quarreled with someone who was similarly aiming for the egg on the way.”

“Similarly?”

Towards Ilya’s question, Frank nodded with a slight frown.

“That’s what they said, but… when they first approached, it seemed to be a person. However, it had changed into a yellow-scaled sea snake with a horn before they’d realized. By the time they somehow managed to lose it, it seems the egg was already been taken by those three.”

Hearing the snake’s features, Ilya remembered the

Horned Serpent she saw in the Heavenly Palace. Note 3)

She was thinking about new questions related to the hatchling: who was the person who first commissioned for the egg to be taken, who was the other person aiming for the egg, and why the qilin was protecting the egg.

(Wow… this is troublesome…)

Reprimanding her dispirited heart, Ilya asked Frank something.

"…How were they ordered to deal with the monster horse?"

"It seems that wasn't explicitly mentioned. There's no doubting it since they even met their client."

Ria couldn't believe her ears.

The thieves guild was essentially the same as a black company. Its subordinates weren't humans, but parts. The extremities were just sent the commissions from those at the top. Let alone hear the pros and cons of the commission, they didn't even meet their clients directly.

“Those two were in a decent position, weren’t they.”

Though Ilya was surprised, Frank didn’t seem to feel the same.

“Yeah. Befitting of their abilities. There’s a huge difference between them and those small time scoundrels from before.”

Though Frank finished it in a single blow, he sensed Katie wasn’t far off from Bard, who had dodged his first attack. Meanwhile, even while Ilya nodded to his words, she didn’t truly agree.

The thieves guild she knew was filled with gerontocracy, a system where blood, not ability, meant everything.

(Allen, aren’t you hurrying to reform the headquarters into a blank slate?)

Since not even a few years have passed since parting with that half-elf, she wasn’t to the point of being impatient. However, if harm reached the outside, she would have to come up with a way to change it from the outside without waiting for it to be changed from

the inside.

Halting her thoughts there for now, Ilya returned her attention to Frank once more.

“Did they say anything about the client?”

“Yeah. They said his name was Catoh, though it’s probably a pseudonym. Still, the man’s characteristics are: medium build, slender, shoulder length brown hair, and light brown eyes.”

An appearance you could find anywhere, it very likely wouldn’t be a clue.

“Even so, it seems he had a dark brown scale on his neck. I expect that it’s a species from somewhere, but… do you know which?”

“Yes… I do.”

One scale on the neck.

When returning their dragon form, their scales would revert. This was proof of a dragon taking human form.

“I see… I understand now with that.”

“Really?”

Although Ilya was composed and nodded, on the inside she was wanting to scream.

The only dragons that could take human form were the dragon god and his kin. The qilin wouldn't take any actions that would betray the dragon god, it wouldn't steal a living thing in the first place.

In other words, though it wasn't good for the dragon god, the person who wanted to use this hatchling and who was obstructing that person were both his kin.

So then, the qilin used her to guarantee the hatchling's safety. Ilya concluded such.

(That horse...!)

She seethed in anger from being involved in family troubles.

"Ilya?"

"Let's leave that aside for the time being. They should get in contact sooner or later."

They didn't have to go to the trouble of heading to the Heavenly Palace. The qilin brought the hatchling here

as a diversion, but the hatchling wasn't at fault for that. She didn't want to get the hatchling caught up in the trouble.

"Get in contact… not like last night, right?"

"Right."

It would have been a different story if they aimed for the hatchling before this, but the qilin wasn't stupid. It always moved before its opponents precisely because it was sensitive to hostility and murderous intent.

She saw the qilin far in the distant sky the day before, its inexplicable actions could be explained assuming it was waiting until the blood lust vanished.

Since it was watching from the sky, it should have seen the assassins were captured and would make its move soon.

Thinking that, Ilya smiled at the hatchling.

"What should I do when it arrives~"

"Pi?"

As she caressed the hatchling that was inclining its

head, it closed its eyes from the pleasant feeling. If she were told to protect this child, it was important to receive something of equal worth.

(Speaking of the Heavenly Palace's treasures, I wonder if it'll be the Dragon God's Bracelet? No, maybe the Dragon God's Earrings would be given up?) The bracelet was a magic tool made from the dragon god's scales that could use the owner's magical power to produce a magic barrier. She wanted to put it on the hatchling until it was able to clad itself in magical power on its own.

The Dragon God's Earrings were made with ashes of the deceased and could turn into a physical barrier. Though the hatchling had a defensive strength that could ignore ordinary attacks at present, she wanted it to have it until it learned how to use wind-type magic barriers.

She'd refused accepting both in the Heavenly Palace previously, but it was a different story if it were to protect the hatchling.

(And since it's compatible with the dragon element,

it’s a perfect fit for the hatchling!)

Not limited to magic tools, she was excited thinking about the hatchling’s future growth.

“Expand your dreams!”

“Pi!”

Come if you dare qilin, Ilya thought as she glared looking outside the window.

Part 5

Though Ilya's thoughts didn't reach it, the qilin dashed through the air.

In order to get to that place as fast as possible, it concentrated its magical power into its legs.

As it pierced through the sea of clouds covering the yellow earth below, in the hole on the layer of clouds that seemed to extend onward forever, it saw the swirling vortex.

Descending through the center of the vortex so that it wouldn't be caught up by the air currents, there was a lush green forest.

In addition to the forest, there was a lone summit that symbolized nobility. A waterfall formed from a spring there, producing a rainbow from its falling water that built a bridge across the forest.

A lake spread out beneath the waterfall. Enshrined in its center was a U-shaped mansion.

As soon as it went down to the mansion, the qilin

changed its appearance into a human's.

Taking out the clothes from the bag on its back, it put them on in the blink of an eye.

Stopping to greet his brethren as he passed them, the qilin headed towards the mansion's inner parlor.

"Jean-sama! I am here to report regarding the White Child!"

White Child… naming the hatchling that despite being his own offspring, he couldn't possibly overlook it.

Even though he thought that, he was surprised when the sliding doors opening after several seconds was.

"Speak, Aurel."

His facial expression was obviously haggard.

It was to be expected, yet his chest tightened anew by seeing his lord's appearance.

The qilin immediately fell to his knees, reporting to his lord.

"I shall report on the whereabouts of the White Child."

“Is it safe!?”

“It is indeed safe… As he is under the protection of Ilya-sama, please be at ease.”

Ilya.

Jean stiffened for a moment when he heard that name.

Then, as Jean recalled the appearance tied to that name, an image formed in his mind.

Not just her outer beauty, but all of her charmed him. Just remembering her smile made him unable to suppress the throbbing in his heart.

If it was under her protection, then it would definitely be safe.

“Is that so…”

Jean let out a breath in relief and reminisced about his desire.

Standing in front of a private room on the second floor of the branch, Ilya opened the door after knocking.

“Excuse me.”

When Ilya entered bowing—

“I waited for it! Ilya’s love!”

Swinging his scarlet hair that reached his shoulders, a beautiful person came soaring towards her.

Quickly sidestepping, Ilya gave him a gaze of contempt.

“…Shouldn’t you say that to your child first? Dragon God-sama.”

“So harsh~”

Right, this was the dragon god.

(… I didn’t think the perpetrator himself would come.)

Amazed, Ilya cast a glance towards the youth standing next to the dragon god.

“Don’t you also think so, qilin?”

“Y-yes…”

The brown-haired youth received her glance, looking away embarrassed.

Since the one to blame for this was the dragon god, Ilya

didn't understand why he was embarrassed. But speaking honestly, qilin was qilin after all.

"I was going to hug this child of course… Right. Above all, a splendid child was born."

"Pi…"

The dragon king patted him, but the hatchling wasn't pleased.

"Pi!"

"Ow—"

Far from being pleased, it stopped his hand with a slap from its tail.

"Hey you, I don't like that," though it didn't say that, it could be seen with a glance. Jean turned to Ilya and gave her a wry smile.

"Oww… children imitate their parent's coldness. That's why, Ilya. Obediently become my wife."

"Don't want to."

Who's a parent? Who would think of a guy like that who changes his speaking manner as a parent?

Though she had various things to say she held them back.

(This is why I hate getting involved with this idiot.)

Ilya cursed him in her thoughts. However, since Jean likely didn't notice, or perhaps only pretended not to notice, he continued speaking without looking as though he minded.

"I know that in your heart, you want to know of this body of mine right? A person who would accept you more than me doesn't exist."

"No thank you."

Ilya had memories of being a man, but nevertheless she had no intention of entertaining a hermaphrodite partner.

"Rather than spending your time talking about such inconsequential things, please hurry up and tell me your business here."

"I often say it's a habit of my longevity."

"Someone other than me wouldn't have enough

composure and get caught up by you. I'll call the branch manager. Then you will explain."

"It can't be helped then..."

It couldn't be helped but the questions and answers were useless.

Called in, Frank sat across the table facing the dragon god. Ilya and the qilin stood behind.

Though the dragon god objected a bit, Ilya completely ignored him.

"Jean-sama, I shall introduce you two. This one is the guild association's Branch Manager, Deshan. Branch Manager Deshan, this one here is the dragon god, Jean-sama."

Frank froze at hearing Jean's identity.

Facing him, the dragon god's face was similar to a noh mask.

"How about this. Call me Jean, Deshan-sama. Since my wife has received your favor, please call me dragon god or Jean as you prefer."

"T-there's no way I would do so. Dragon God-sama. Please call me Deshan."

"I'll take the liberty to correct something. Dragon God-sama and I are complete strangers."

She flatly denied Jean's frivolous words.

She didn't want to leave any mentions of that left alone just in case. Since it would be troublesome if he said this and that to hold a ceremony in the Heavenly Palace, she changed the topic before it could come up again.

"Dragon God-sama, would you please let us hear your true intentions as to why you entrusted us with the hatchling?"

“Hmph.”

The dragon god was brooding, opening his mouth before long.

“First of all I must correct you, I have just recently come to know of this. Aurel. Say it yourself.”

“Certainly, Jean-sama. This all originated from the time when Jean-sama’s two children were born.”

“Eh, two children?”

“To be exact, twins.”

Twins. The family’s secret maneuvering, as well as the qilin’s morals. Obtaining that information, Ilya could now read the current flow as well.

“Usually, there wouldn’t be any problems as the the first child would inherit the title of dragon god, but someone moving behind the scenes appeared to take the opportunity.”

“Succession… no, a factional dispute?”

The qilin nodded at Frank’s prediction.

“When I noted the hostility filling the Heavenly

Palace, one had already been encircled. In order to protect the other egg, I reluctantly brought it the surface. I'm not interested in the factional dispute, nor did I want to use dragon god's honorable child... above all as Ilya-sama is a person of honor, in order to ensure you accepted it without having your permission, I gradually guided passersby to you."

He judged that was more or less enough and didn't say that only Ilya had the power to protect it.

"I sincerely apologize for having involved unrelated people."

Expressing his gratitude, he bowed deeply.

Though he was kin, qilin, who was of the dragon god's lineage, showing his sincerity caused Frank's mind to tremble.

"Please raise your head. Fortunately no one died, and above all it's over."

"For your honorable mercy, I am very sorry."

During that conversation, Ilya wanted to strike the dragon god who was nodding with a self-satisfied

expression on the head.

There was a reason that producing kin with those feelings resulted in a faction being born. If he wasn't interested in putting something together in case of a dispute, he didn't have the qualifications for making one of his kin act as the parent.

While she was suppressing her anger and playing with the hatchling, Frank was calm.

"So, since you have both come here, is it safe to assume you've found a solution?"

"No."

The dragon god answered promptly.

To him so easily denying it, Ilya was so amazed she was exhausted.

"As I said earlier, I've just recently come to know this."

"Then—"

"Me coming today was for both my thanks and my apology. At the same time, my request as well."

The dragon god turned towards Ilya, lowering his

head.

“For protecting my beloved child, from the bottom of my heart, thank you. Moreover, I sincerely apologize for my relative’s carelessness causing trouble for you.”

“Neither affected me alone. As both require formal documents, please submit them to the guild branch.”

“Understood. I will do so if that is this place’s custom.”

“Then, what was your request?”

The dragon god’s eyes felt unusually serious.

“Well, I want you to raise the child.”

(Thought so.)

What would happen in the Heavenly Palace if Ilya was pushed into taking care of the child?

The factional struggle would die down and the hatchling’s safety would be guaranteed. Though it could be called too much, since he could make a connection with Ilya, the dragon god only saw advantages to painfully part with his child.

She wondered about the intentions behind the slightly

unusual adoption.

Absolutely refused.

At least, that was the conclusion she came to by just thinking about the Heavenly Palace's motives.

However, when Ilya looked at the hatchling—

"I understand."

Is what she answered the dragon god with.

Other than Ilya, everyone's eyes opened in surprised.

"However, I have two conditions."

"Please say anything. Even if it's my love."

"I don't want something like that."

What love? She looked at Jean with her eyes half-closed as though to say something more.

He could lay eggs without mating. However, with the large amount of kin the dragon god had, she could only think his words of love was an excuse for sex. Ilya couldn't believe the dragon god.

"First of all, this child's intentions."

“Pi?”

Ilya held the hatchling in her arms and moved its line of sight, gesturing to Jean.

“That person is your parent.”

“...Pi.”

Directing its sight to the dragon god, the hatchling more or less understood and let out a whine.

“You can live with live with everyone there you know?”

“I-Ilya-sama.”

“I would stop the factional dispute. No matter the enemy.”

Turned her gaze to Jean as she said that, even the dragon god’s face stiffened. The qilin’s face had paled.

“Where do you want to live?”

“Pi...”

Did it understand? The hatchling looked between Ilya and the dragon god alternatingly.

When she let it down onto the table since it couldn't choose while being held, the hatchling walked nervously.

It was advancing towards the dragon god.

Ilya would suppress the factional dispute. Though it would cause a serious situation, that was still its parent. With a complicated look, the hatchling slowly headed towards the dragon god who couldn't conceal his joy.

As the dragon god hesitantly held out his hand, the hatchling licked it.

"I see..."

She cast down her eyes, determining something. Seeing the parent and child's appearances, Ilya smiled.

(I'll also resolve myself.)

If she just scolded the people who caused the factional strife, it probably wouldn't break her self discipline. Already thinking up excuses unintentionally, Ilya was disgusted at herself.

“Ilya, though I’m sorry… I’ll leave it to you.”

“Yeah. I understand.”

The dragon god stood up and gave a nod to Ilya. However, when he tried to hold the hatchling—

“Pi!”

“Ow—!”

His hand was repelled by its tail.

“”” Eh? “””

Running to the girl who was blinking her eyes in surprise, the hatchling made a mad dash and jumped towards Ilya.

“Pi—! Pi~!”

“Oh—hey now.”

Licking her face, the hatchling behaved spoiled as much as it wanted.

“”” … … … “””

Where did that atmosphere from a moment ago go? Embarrassment and disappointment mixing, a

complex mood filled the room.

(That lick a moment ago, don't tell me it was something like a farewell?)

Unable to find words that would clear the mood, Ilya reluctantly decided to continue the conversation.

"Oh… well, the second condition…"

"Ah, yeah."

"Please have the Heavenly Palace fully cooperate to defend this child."

"Y-yeah. Of course. Whether it's food, strength, or magic tools, anything is fine."

Promises being exchanged in that lifeless atmosphere was strange.

Though Ilya worried if he would properly protect it for a moment, since the qilin who could be called a mass of honor was there, it was probably alright.

"T-then please accept these."

What the qilin passed to her was a decoration with a translucent stone in its center, the Dragon God's

Piercing.

A magic tool close to having the function of a transceiver, the Dragon God's Piercing could use the wind to contact the dragon god no matter the distance.

Though she didn't think it would come back to her again after being politely returned in the past, Ilya decided having it would be convenient and accepted the piercing.

"Then Ilya… sorry, but I'll leave it to you…"

"Ah, yeah…"

Though the exchange should have been the exact same as earlier, the tension was as different as heaven and earth.

Going as originally planned, the dragon god continued to grow depressed.

(Nice one, hatchling!)

Not letting her cheers escape her thoughts, Ilya asked Jean about something that had been on her mind.

"By the way, what is this child's name?"

“Eh?”

Don’t give me an ‘eh’, idiot. Though she started to say that, she kept it from leaving her mouth.

In contrast, Jean had an expression on as though he were surprised.

“I thought you’d definitely named it already.”

“Though I know who the parent is, isn’t that something you shouldn’t gloss over…”

The dragon god laughed, the qilin letting out a silent sigh.

“Then Ilya, I’ll leave it to you.”

“…Are you sane?”

“Of course I’m sane. Besides, I’m serious. So that you will also bring it up with love you know?”

Was his idiocy calculated, or was it natural?

Ilya couldn’t understand the dragon god’s character that well.

With things concerning the hatchling’s movement

settled, the dragon god returned to the Heavenly Palace. However, Frank, likely due to his anxiety, lied down in his bedroom.

(Maybe I should bring him some porridge later?)

Considering herself to be partly responsible, Ilya thought about such a thing from her guild.

Though other than that, there was another problem she was concerned of.

“What should I do…”

“Pi~…”

After returning to the reception desk, Ilya spent her free time absorbed in thought.

“What’s wrong, Ilya? Is something the matter?”

“Oh, Elizah. Good work today. It’s nothing much.”

“Pi…”

Seeing the hatchling whine in worry, Elizah unintentionally smiled.

“Ilya, you’ve been bringing this child around

everywhere. Is this child what's worrying you?"

"Yeah. To tell the truth—"

Just as she started to speak, the entrance door was opened.

"Welcome."

"Welcome…"

Although greeting guests was pretty much a conditioned reflex, Ilya lacked the motivation for it.

(I don't want to hear bad rumors about the hospitality either.)

Though Ilya was thinking up excuses to justify herself, she didn't know that the rumors were really being set off by her 'listless' and 'fragile' beauty.

"Good morning, Elizah-san. Ilya-san, long time no see."

"Heya Ilya, Eliza. That child is… the rumored dragon!?"

The ones who arrived were Katia and Elivia, having returned from their expedition to gain cash.

Same as the townspeople, they didn't seem to fear the dragon, instead holding their hands out towards the hatchling.

"Ahaha, it's so cute~. What's its name?"

"I haven't decided yet."

"No way, is that what's causing you to be worried?"

"Un."

The first candidate was 'Chick'. However, that was rejected since it was half-baked like naming something big 'Child'.

The main concern for her wracking her brains? Its gender.

As it grew, whether its appearance inclining more towards a man or a woman would become clear. Since that couldn't be determined at the moment, she was wanting to avoid a name that sounded too rugged or too cute.

"I wondered if Haku was good, but..." Note 4)

A white that doesn't know defilement. A while that

shined on everything equally. Ilya really wanted that, but although she gave an expression as though she was embarrassed by wanting it, the reactions from those in her surroundings were different.

“I think it’s good!”

“Un, it’s a beautiful white dragon, isn’t it perfect?”

“Ilya-chan is its parent after all. You get to decide it with pleasure.”

“Un un!”

Katia and Elizah, as well as everyone in the dining room who heard the conversation, decided it was Haku before she realized it.

Having no objections at all, Katia smiled while petting Haku.

“Pleased to meet you, Haku-chan.”

“Protect Ilya-chan well, okay?”

“Pi!”

With the dining room full of smiles, Ilya smiled wryly.

“Ooh! Reliable isn’t it!”

“Now even Ilya-chan can be relieved!”

While the hall was expressing its jubilance, Lydia, who added herself into the conversation from the kitchen, asked Ilya a question.

“Speaking of children, how are Ilya-chan’s parents doing?”

“They’re living. Probably.”

“That’s good then. You should go and see them occasionally you know?”

“Is that so…”

Ilya gave a vague answer to end the topic. Since even her family more or less excluded her and even her parents threw her away as a child, she could probably get information from York who could leave the village.

(Not coming is fine though.)

“Pi?”

“No, it’s nothing.”

While gently petting Haku who was looking up, Ilya remembered her previous times.

Her previous life's family was just a normal family. Though there was nothing to boast about, there was nothing bad about having a normal family.

At one time, she thought about what if she was born into a more prosperous family, what if she was born under parents with connections. However, when they were about to be fired from making a mistake in the placement of a single digit, when they were dying from being driven out by co-workers and made to voluntarily retire due to taking maternity leave, and still able to give encouragement. That was a normal family.

—She was glad to be born into that family.

She sincerely thought so.

One day, this child will also leave.

Separating will likely be painful.

Being wounded, suffering.

Rather than intimidating others and letting your heart turn rotten like Kramer and the assassins—

Rather than trying to suppress others by scaring them with strength like the thieves guild's executives—

Rather than shutting your mind to all but your relatives like the dragon god—

It's fine to run away.

Even if people laugh at you for fleeing shamefully, so long as you are alive in this world, you can try anything over again.

So when the time comes, be at peace and escape from it, returning with confidence to the place you can be safe at…

"Pleased to meet you, Haku."

"Pi—!"

—For this child, I hope this can become such a place.

Ilya smiled, looking around the room while gently caressing the young dragon.

Chapter Three – The Decision

Part 1

The city located to the south of Rondéville Kingdom's royal capital, Lunéville.

East of Lunéville was Pinéaville, next to the Akradist Kingdom's territory. When it was known as Pinéadist, it had developed into a majorly fortified city-base as defense against invasions from the east.

However, the Pinéa region merged together during the king before last's reign. When the previous generation's king invited Akradist's first princess to be his queen, its importance as a base was lost. Still, it changed into an important trade route to the royal capital. From then on, its walls no longer suited it as it transitioned into an agricultural city.

Not that it had a specialty product even though it was called an agricultural city either. Two big thieves guilds that were entrenched in Rondéville, led by [Sal of the Copper Paper] and [Mabelt of the Lotus],

mutually fought for supremacy to rule its underground.

Of course, though most citizens would leave a city like that, some couldn't for various reasons. They spent their days in fright and destitution while the guilds fought.

Then came Hector, demoted to a troublesome location (self-proclaimed) of such low importance.

And then was Frank, a man selected to become the Guild Association's Lunéville Branch Manager at the young age of twenty-seven.

The two thieves guilds were expelled without a trace by these two people's efforts, transforming the city into a safe place for everyone to live free from worldly cares.

It was this place that the girl, Ilya Schultz, set her eyes on.

"I'll never forgive those who try to destroy its tranquility. O-other than the townspeople (mostly) that is."

Finally finding Lunéville after her long life as a wanderer, it was her haven.

“An inn town?”

Ilya had met with Frank in the parlor. Haku was sleeping soundly while rolled into a ball on her apron.

“Does Ilya know that the amount of people coming here recently has increased?”

“Yes… mostly.”

She knew that the majority of people arriving came for the cooking.

The rest came sniffing out the money trail, Commerce and Industry Guild’s guild members aiming for travelers and guild members.

Ilya’s thoughts weren’t far off the mark.

“Though Lunéville has come to be acknowledged as safe and peaceful when compared to surrounding cities, even the royal capital has come to know of it. It seems that the budget compilation meeting the other day increased Lunéville’s development plan.”

Looking over the documents Frank presented to her, she certainly did see the fortunate contents to redevelop Lunéville into an inn town. Each of the documents had been carefully affixed with Rondéville king's seal.

The contents were regarding boundaries and road maintenance. It was scheduled for a new road to be constructed, replacing the one they had had up till then.

"Was Hector-san at the royal capital?"

"Yeah… he was complaining about the aristocrats' tastes. He just went there to plan ahead."

(My condolences.)

Was it better to call it house arrest or imprisonment? Ilya expected the other aristocrats probably had something like an allergic reaction from the upstart aristocrat trying to stick around.

"Did Hector-san have something to say about the project?"

"No, I didn't ask. He probably isn't against it though. If

that man said he seriously didn't like it, he would have torn it up and thrown it away on the spot."

"I-is that so?"

She held the impression of him being gentle, so that was surprising.

"Though the budget's contents are normally assigned by the country, it appears that they won't be issuing a quote for it until the next budget compilation. I'd like for you to put out a commission to the guild to calculate the costs."

"To the guild...? To begin with, how far are they planning on turning this into an inn town? I don't understand the plan."

"By how far, do you mean the scale?"

"No, the kind of people that would stay here."

If they made accommodations for upper class people, but made accommodations for others to be multiple people sleeping in a group, she wouldn't approve.

"That is to say, the amount of people is directly tied to

the deterioration of public security. Don't remove Lunéville's good point by attracting unsavory individuals."

"Most would come as guild members though. I doubt they would spend much money on lodging."

"I assume you have no problems with maintaining our current quality of clientele?"

Frank thought for a moment, nodding before long.

"I want to continue on how we are."

"...Mmm."

Recently, most of the inns had been at max occupancy.

The branch would lend private rooms to individuals that were unable to secure hotel lodgings in harsh weather.

The branch had also sent out a commission for citizens who owned houses to rent out rooms.

Marketing probably had some uneasiness over more being sold out than were left to sell, thinking it was a bad situation.

“Gathering all of the landowners and working with them to establish their residence areas and inns is Hector-san’s job right? The building costs of the landowners’ dwellings, including the explanation of the total infrastructure improvement costs by Hector-san, are you sure that is alright?”

“Yeah. Charon’s gotten in contact with the Industry Guild, so they’ll send some people out.”

The people called over this time were architectural engineers that belonged to the Industry Guild.

Housing construction was different from general commissions, each party (contractors rather than groups) would gather and carry out a construction commission meeting at the guild. Then, each party would estimate the construction costs for the commission, with the one with the lowest bid amongst the gathering getting the rights for the construction.

Whether they would participate in the meeting would depend on each party, with larger parties staying away from small profit commissions by an unspoken agreement.

Though it was also possible that a client would send the commission directly to a party and not the guild, since the merits like contribution compensation and rank-ups disappeared as well, so long as there wasn't some special circumstance, such arrangements rarely happened.

Accordingly, if the Mercenary Guild's duty was to manage and unify guild members belonging to it, the Industry Guild's role was to maintain reasonable pricing and check for moral hazards in the construction industry. Though there were also the roles of maintenance and development, the current status quo had each business relying on others.

By the way, in the case of do-it-yourself people, they could accept commissions even if they weren't qualified to be an Industry Guild member. Because there were no carpenters in Lunéville, Sullivan was the one to take orders and mend armor.

Now let's return to the main subject.

First was to make arrangements for the Industry Guild representatives and calculate the rough expenses of

the dwelling structures and facilities. Then, based on the costs, look for candidates to reconstruct inns for the landowners.

However, there was a point of uncertainty that had to be clarified before going any further.

“The budget is just for road maintenance materials, but will the subsidies regarding housing construction and immigration decrease?”

“That’s right… it’ll be carried out by the country. There’s no question that they would keep those expenses in mind as well.”

“…They may tell Hector-san to take it from the subsidies though.”

Although Ilya thought that a country should help those in it out to gain their favor, she didn’t expect the plan to stand on such wishful thinking.

At any rate, it wasn’t a waste for them to figure out uneasy factors.

“Then there would also be the transportation of the materials for construction and its guards, as well as

guards for the road maintenance."

"Yeah. Given the situation, we need to have the inn construction go through first before improving the road."

"...For the increased amount of people."

"That's right. If mercenaries were used to guard Lunéville, the amount of personnel staying here would increase substantially. Could we cover it?"

By 'it', of course he was referring to meals.

"I don't think there would be any problems with the distribution if we purchased a large amount of foodstuffs... What about food and drink shops?"

"That's, well... people interested in setting those shops up haven't turned up."

"Is that so..."

Though to tell the truth, something like that was inconsequential for Ilya. What she was truly worried about was there being more monsters with the increase in people.

Considering the source of monsters, it wasn't hard to fall into a vicious cycle since the amount of monsters increased proportional to people.

The number of monsters went up as the number of people went up. To exterminate monsters, people gathered.

Truly a vicious cycle.

In order for there to be more commissions for the guild, everything worked out with the increase in monsters. However, since the plan this time was simply inviting more monsters to come, it produced a contradiction. The guild, which should have been removing the town's threats, was exposing it to more danger for the sake of profit. So even though it was against what she truly wanted, Ilya, who was a mere receptionist, couldn't intervene.

More importantly though, she knew that the townspeople wished for the expansion.

(There's no way I could go against it.)

Muttering that in her mind, she settled her murky

feelings.

After a lot of conferences and meetings, around a month had passed for the documents and commission registrations to be completed in various places, as well as an additional several weeks for transporting the materials and the start of the construction.

“Ilya, sorry! Please bring this to Elizah!”

Accepting the dish from the kitchen next to the counter, she headed towards the temporary terrace established outside of the entrance.

When she was about to open the door, Elizah appeared after vigorously opening the door. Since Ilya was nimble, of course Elizah was as well, they passed by each other without colliding as though they were dancing gracefully.

“Ah, sorry Ilya! Thanks!”

“It’s alright, I can bring it. Elizah can leave it to me.”

“Got it!”

On the other side of the door, there were twelve large

tables that faced the main street placed on the terrace. However, they were all packed. Even if it was always like that inside, they had to clean up despite people eating and drinking while they stood outside.

“Sorry to have kept you waiting, here is your yakitori.” Note 5)

“”” Oooh~! “””

“Allow me to take your empty dishes.”

They were getting drunk, so she immediately retreated when she sensed danger from the looks in their eyes. Elizah, who she had exchanged roles with, shared a wry smile with her after she returned inside, probably due to her working at the reception desk instead of Ilya. Frank was standing at the counter.

“Sorry, Frank-san.”

“No, you’ve had it tough. Sorry as well, Luke. You had to come in despite today not being your night shift.”

“It’s fine, I have a lot of free time on my hands after all.”

Frank smiled bitterly, that’s just how Luke was.

Currently, Ria, Rachelle, and the wolf beastkin Darren were on the second floor serving tables. Elizah, Clarice, and Cynthia were moving about the first floor serving tables. Ilya and Luke were at the reception desk.

In other words, everyone was working. They were so packed that they'd reached the point where Darren and Clarice, who mainly worked reception services, had to take turns waiting on tables.

"But this is an amazing amount of people…"

Catching Frank's mutter, Ilya glanced over the dining area.

The faces of newcomers were mixed in with those of their regulars, primarily Industry Guild workers. With the inn construction and area development rush, Lunéville's population had temporarily inflated considerably. In addition to the terrace they had added on, they were also delivering some directly to the construction site.

"I wonder if it'll be bad if we don't hire more waiters ahead of time?"

“Please don’t forget about the kitchen.”

“T-that’s right.”

Her endurance wouldn’t be a problem due to her cheat, but doing it alone would be mentally stressful.

Since they had already asked Hector for it, the Association’s Lunéville Branch was in the middle of extending its dining area. The building next to the branch was currently under construction, but Frank still hadn’t decided on its opening staff.

As for why Frank was still racking his brains, that was because of him being vigilant due to the assassins that had invaded the other day.

(Even though he said that he’d say something if he saw them…)

When she lightly scowled at Frank with a pout, the person in question felt Ilya’s gaze and turned towards her.

“Do you think the branch’s faculty are good as is?”

“Yes. With everyone’s capabilities, I don’t think we

can't do it."

"Un. That's right."

"If the branch's operations increase, we can just remodel the second floor's dining area into an office."

"Right."

Nonetheless, the fact was that waiting on tables and being a receptionist right then was a big burden.

Ilya decided that she would snatch the people that seemed like they could help when she next got a chance.

Part 2

Early morning the next day, Ilya was heading to the branch's basement warehouse.

The whole warehouse was made so that it was impossible to enter or leave if you didn't have the key. It was currently being used as a prison to confine the two assassins.

Though they were being confined, it was better circumstances than a bad inn with the provided bed and three simple meals.

However, the residents' gazes that met Ilya opening the lock were exuding wariness.

"You've been restrained for so long, I'm sorry."

Even though they heard Ilya apologize, the two didn't let down their guards.

Ilya, who had judged that such roundabout methods wouldn't make any progress, decided to immediately get down to business.

“Thieves Guild members, Bard-san. Katie-san. Your sentences have been decided, so I’ve come to inform you.”

Their names called, both of their bodies jolted.

Their restraints had been undone when they were put in the prison after their interrogation. And now, Ilya had opened the only escape route. However, their bodies couldn’t move.

It was as though they couldn’t go against this girl in front of them, like their bodies were ordered to stay still.

“Sentences huh. Is there any use negotiating with the guild?”

Bard had trouble holding back his voice from quivering, doing his best to hold up his facade.

“Well, even though I said your sentences have been decided, the final decision is based on what happens next.”

“…?”

Both of them expressed a questioning look from Ilya's strange phrasing.

"Let's play a game of tag."

"Huh…?"

They doubted their ears.

Although they went through childhood without its normal naivety, they knew the rules for tag.

Due to that, they couldn't understand her intentions at all.

Ilya watched the two perplexed people in satisfaction, continuing to speak.

"The range is the entire town of Lunéville. You run away, I look for you. If either of you two manage to keep away until nightfall, you will be acquitted. If you are caught, both of you will have to do what I say."

"_"

Don't fuck with me.

Though he wanted to shout that, he did his best to suppress it.

"...Any other rules?"

"At the point in time you go out into Lunéville, please know that your lives are forfeit should you injure any citizen."

Her expression hadn't changed at all. This girl's dangerous manner of speaking caused them to hold their breath.

"There are no additional rules. Please, any questions?"

Seeing the two react with silence, Ilya nodded.

"Well then, I'll return to the branch. Feel free to take this time to leave."

Ilya saw them off with a bow, leaving Bard dumbfounded.

It was good he was being underestimated. If she had any ulterior motives, he just had to overcome them.

"Katie. We will operate separately after leaving this warehouse. Focus on that woman, think only about staying away from her."

"Got it."

When Ilya's presence was completely gone, Katie nodded at Bard. Carefully, the two quickly distanced themselves from the warehouse.

Though he thought that Ilya would go for them right from the start, it was later that afternoon before she actually left the branch.

Currently, Katie was hiding a distance away and could just barely sense Ilya's presence and had kept her distance in order to secure her escape route. Bard was erasing his presence while concealed in a spot where he could see the branch, outwitting the premise of him running away. He was contriving to escape detection while shadowing the oni's actions. Note 6)

Since it was early morning when Ilya went down to see them, half of the time had already passed.

(Is she planning on exhausting us mentally…?)

The anxious Bard didn't look weary at all. He smiled, thinking it was unfortunate for her.

But in the next moment, Bard stopped smiling and immediately left as fast as he could.

(I-impossible!)

Ilya, who had just exited the branch's staff entrance, uneventfully stopped for a moment and stared at Bard, beginning to walk straight towards him.

(Didn't I erase my presence!?)

He reconfirmed his situation in a confused state of mind, but none of the citizens payed attention to Bard, not a single one.

Bard was running away at full speed thinking that Ilya was in pursuit, but there were no signs that she would catch up.

Since he was calming down thinking that he wouldn't lose in leg strength, Bard started to search for a suitable position to watch for Ilya's approach again.

Meanwhile, Katie was flustered.

(Eh...? She disappeared...!?)

When she left the group of presences... the branch, she lost track of the feeling.

Though Katie couldn't sense presences down to

breathing fluctuations like her partner, Bard, she couldn't feel Ilya's presence in the slightest.

With that, she was incredibly shaken.

(What do I do…)

Bard told her to devote herself to evading that presence.

She couldn't find the presence. So now she had to run.

But where?

Based on what?

Her mind only able to think about finishing that thought, her body naturally didn't move.

(What do I do…—)

A chill ran through her. Thinking was hopeless. Her head started to issue complaints from the problem continuing to make its rounds.

Katie couldn't hold back a feeling she'd forgotten for a long time now, the feeling that she was [Caught].

"Be at ease, please rest for now."

Sensing her presence and hearing a voice, it was without a doubt Ilya.

She was caught.

Immediately after realizing that, Katie lost her hold on consciousness without even seeing Ilya's face.

Several hours after Katie lost.

Bard was completely exhausted.

Even though he hid himself while running away, Ilya slowly approached him no matter what he did.

Her walking never paused; she obviously knew where Bard was at all times.

(I can't run away…)

At least, so long as he was inside Lunéville. As soon as he thought that—

"You've obviously slowed down. Are you becoming tired?"

Ilya, who should have been about as far away in the distance as to be as large as his thumb, was in front of

him.

Did I black out?

Although Bard thought that for a moment, the positions of people around him had hardly changed.

(So I can't win in speed either?)

Bard, who was standing still in a daze from realizing that, felt Ilya's touch on his shoulder.

"Caught you."

Bard looked at Ilya.

Although the elf girl's smile was beautiful, she was more like a monster or monster.

Bard was drained of strength, losing his will to run away.

"Allow me to guide you to the inn Katie-san is resting at. Since the inn is also the branch's lodging, please don't do anything strange there okay?"

"...Like I have a choice."

Obediently, he followed Ilya's guidance.

In this way, Ilya first goal of determining their treatment was achieved, as well as her second goal of having them recognize the difference in their abilities.

The next day.

A man and woman standing in front of Ilya were wearing the branch's uniform.

"...Hey, why do I have to wear something like this?"

"I thought it suited you nicely though? Don't you think so too, Katie-san?"

"Un. Bard, it fits you."

Praised by Katie, Bard seemed to lose himself a bit.

However, when he noticed Ilya looking at them, he immediately went back to scowling.

"...You really think we can do something like serve customers?"

"It's not impossible and you can do it, so do it. You lost the game right?"

Bard held his tongue with that line.

Bard, who was a black panther beastkin, had black hair and tanned skin. His slim and tall figure's muscles were moderately showing through the branch uniform that looked like butler clothing. Katie had soft black hair and was fair-skinned, and with her being a saluki-type[Note 7)] dog beastkin, her ears hung down. Her black-based uniform provided a wonderful contrast with the white frills that swayed as she moved.

The only thing that dissatisfied Ilya was that she was trained so that her tail wouldn't react alongside her emotions.

(Such a waste.)

By having offered up more information on the Thieves Guild, their punishments were deferred. Though even if they were on parole, it was unclear how they would eventually deal with the two of them.

Ilya got Frank's permission to meet them, but seeing that they didn't kill themselves or do anything weird despite having their restraints undone, she once again judged that they weren't brainwashed.

Accordingly, she suggested a game.

As for what Ilya, the winner, told the two to do? Of course, it was to work as staff for the branch.

“And so, you two will work here from now on. I’ll give you both manuals, so Bard-san, please learn reception duties from Luke. And Katie-san, please learn waitress duties from Ria.”

“Got it.”

“...Tch.”

She poked Bard in the forehead.

Even though she was suppressed by her equipment, if she put in a bit of effort it would be like being hit from a blunt weapon.

“Owww~...!”

“Take this lightly and I’ll seriously beat you up.”

“O-okay...”

Training at the start was important. Although she didn’t like violence—other than love taps on her enemies—she boasted to Frank beforehand that she would take responsibility, so she wouldn’t do this half-

baked. Somehow or another, it seemed to be effective.

It was still early in the morning so there weren't many guests coming in. It could be called the optimal time to learn their duties. Learning the basics of their job while the amount of people eating breakfast continued to increase, they would learn while following their surroundings. Nothing was to be left to chance.

... At least, nothing should have been.

Part 3

“Bastard, say that again!”

“I’m saying, with you guys’ skills, this commission is waaay to dangerous for you!”

“O-oi, Bard-kun!”

Across from Bard was a group of five guild members. Luke’s restraint on him wasn’t effective either, so it turned into a head-on confrontation.

“...Haaah.”

“Pi?”

When Ilya moved while letting out a small sigh, Haku followed her without the least care in the world.

Although she also had trouble abandoning the subject out of care, she would subdue herself and give a clear cut attitude while working.

“The fuck would a receptionist like you know!?”

“I said you’re in for a painful time if you take this li—”

“Could I have a moment, Bard-san?”

She addressed him with a sweet smiling face, but he quickly shut his mouth as though out of fear.

(That’s odd~. Even though I smiled normally.)

“Monster…”

“Aah!? Who are you to call Ilya a monster, bastard!!”

Everyone blinked towards Luke’s sudden anger, Ilya included. Let alone exhibiting anger, this was the first time he’d even shouted.

What brought that on?

(… Wait, not that!)

Coming back to her senses, she recovered her expression and asked the two.

“Could you explain what happened?”

“Ah, yeah. I looked at the commission chart he handed me and told him it was dangerous.”

“Oi, that’s not what you said! Don’t lie!”

Temporarily leaving the apology towards the

exasperated customer to Luke, she checked the commission charts.

There were two of them, the first was for Rondélocusts. Then, the second one was—

(A Laoloa Boar...)

She had seen its name in the registry relatively recently. In addition, the commission's designated area was the same place too. The subjugation commission for the Laoloa Boars before was successful and their numbers should have decreased, but— (I wonder if I should check to see if they are multiplying or not?)

A thought floating in the corner of her mind, she looked at the guild members that tried to accept it again. Their formation was one swordsman, two pugilists with one of the two having a chain technique skill, one mage, and an alchemist. Note 8)

"Bard-san. Please properly explain why you think it is dangerous."

"A-ah? Nah, too troublesome."

“Did you want to pick a fight? Or did you want to advise them?”

“…”

His silence meant that it was without a doubt the latter. Taking his gauche character into consideration, his way of speaking bluntly when giving advice would generally be due to embarrassment.

(… Is he a child!?)

While giving him a tsukkomi in her mind, she once again smiled outwardly. Note 9)

“If you were just picking a fight, will you accept the suitable punishment?”

“I-I get it! I’ll say it okay!? You guys… you fought against a locust-type or Laoloa Boar before?”

“Aah? ‘Course we have.”

“In the warrior examination.”

“Then, have you fought them together?”

“…No, but—”

(Bard-san, success.)

Convinced, Ilya was relieved.

“If you’ve fought locusts you know they have a toxin… you know that right? Laoloa Boards have low toxin resistance, it infects their whole body very fast. It’s the same with the Rondélocust… get it?”

“Ah…”

The two pugilists frowned. Though the other three were puzzled, they immediately frowned when they also figured out what he meant.

“It’s not a problem if you hunt ’em separately. But if you encounter them together and the boar is infected?”

At a time like that, a Laoloa Boar would probably be enraged. It was a terrifying condition where you’d have to keep running until it loses sight of you or you kill it (or until you yourself die). You’d be afflicted by the toxin if you weren’t careful.

Rear guard mages were good still. Though its body fluids would spread if its cut by the swordsman and

the pugilists would have to hit it directly. If they touched its body or blood that was infected by the toxin, they would probably only hold on for a few seconds with their resistances.

Could they defend their comrades while fighting a group of enemies infected with the toxin?

Seeing them, Bard had judged it to be difficult. That's why he advised it was dangerous.

"...What'll we do?"

They were also beginning to worry.

Especially the pugilists that had particularly high levels, his other comrades seemed to be avoiding saying anything direct.

Ilya decided to ask Bard a question to advance the conversation.

"Well, what does Bard-san think they should do?"

"Huh?"

"It's not advice unless you give a suggestion. You shouldn't just say it's impossible to people alright?"

“Even if you say that…”

Bard brooded over it, but couldn’t easily reach a conclusion.

Luke, who had been watching the situation progress from the side, opened his mouth after being unable to endure any longer.

“You could also bring someone from the Magic Guild, how about trying to have your main offense be magic?”

When Luke spoke, the five just looked at each other awkwardly.

Although mages belonged to the Magic Guild, their ability varied widely. Mages that were able to kill a lot of things even with low class magic like Lula and York were rare, and it was unusual for excellent practitioners to join a faction to begin with.

Even without being able to distinguish ability like Ilya, you could roughly predict how capable a mage travelling with a group of warriors was.

“But my magic isn’t that strong.”

Luke wasn't perturbed by his confession. On the contrary, he smiled to relieve them.

"By prioritizing safety over efficiency, you can do it with either a large or small power. Even with a moderate power, you can defeat it if you shoot several."

"Well, more or less."

"Even if you could defeat one, isn't it your end if other ones showed up?

"Does everyone know how the boars chase after foreign invaders?"

"With their legs… wait, that's not it. Isn't it with their eyes?"

"Though they do of course ultimately find their enemies by their eyesight, in general, boar-types living in forests have poor eyesight. They are unable to search for enemies while running like carnivores are able to. They use their protruding snouts to search for their enemy's smell, chasing after the scent. Due to that, I recommend everyone to use a sachet or

perfume. Note 10)

“So that disturbs the scent huh?”

Understanding that they needed more experience, the group of five devised a strategy.

If they were the standard party, they would put something that had a stronger smell than themselves in bags or the like to use as decoys. If they left it on a tree they could even likely come out of it without taking damage at all.

However, they had an alchemist with them. Ilya knew that he could only grow plants, but he could improve by making a trap by growing thorn-like branches on a tree and placing the scent there or something like that. She also expected that setting up a bundle of vines in the shape of a person at a cliff or waterside would be effective enough.

Of course, she wouldn’t go so far as to interrupt their conversation. It was probably enough with just Luke’s advice this time.

“Prepare your stuff at a tool shop. If you do that, I got

no complaints about you accepting the commission."

"...Please remember about the Rondélocusts as well."

"We get it."

While receiving Luke's support, Bard falteringly completed registering that they accepted it.

Seeing off the group of five leaving in high spirits as though they'd already forgotten about the quarrel, Bard felt relieved.

"...You... helped me. Reception work is hard too, heh."

"That's right. That just now was second-hand information though."

"It was? Did the Branch Manager say it?"

"No no, Ilya did. Most of what I just said, she said beforehand."

He looked towards Ilya with a sour expression.

(... I wonder if he dislikes me that much?)

Though it wasn't like she felt Luke didn't have to give out her name, she felt a bit unpleasant that her

attempt at modesty was denied.

“Whether or not they’ll be able to put the information to use is up to them. Bard-san could also learn various things from Luke, too.”

His shady-looking face had eventually gone away, but this time Bard straightened his posture without any of his rebellious attitude.

As for Katie, who was still carrying trays timidly, Ilya merely wanted her to acquire and improve her skills.

(From the looks of it, Bard-san is predicting what commission people will bring over to accept.)

And he would check over the raw materials upon a subjugation’s completion.

Just that was plenty enough of a change, he was likely striving to improve.

Ilya, who was returning to the counter while thinking so, locked gazes with a person who came into the branch.

“Morning. Is Frank in?”

As for who went towards the counter, it was Hector, the lord.

“Good morning. I think he is in his room right now, should I call for him?”

“Yeah, thanks. Could we use the parlor?”

“Yes. This way, please.”

Holding Haku, Ilya went up to the third floor accompanied by Hector.

“Those were the people you mentioned at the counter?”

“Yes. I had them help starting today.”

“I believe it’ll be fine since it was your decision… but busy waiters aside, was it necessary for him to be at the reception desk?”

“Of course.”

The reason she proposed to hire them wasn’t just for their sake.

“I expect that there will be more commissions from now on, I’m preparing for it.”

“More commissions? The construction work?”

“…It’s not unrelated to that, at least.”

Ilya held her tongue, not saying anything further.

She couldn’t disclose information that no one other than her knew. That was one of the bans she’d imposed on herself. She couldn’t tell them the cause of there being more monsters. Still, knowing what the outcome this time would be, she would make sure to ambiguously tell them to prepare.

“…Is that so. The Elves’ Precepts are troublesome.”

“They are… I’m sorry.”

Though there really were things called the Elves’ Precepts, in truth they held no influence. They were just used to cover over the elves’ behaviors as they weren’t concerned with other races.

The restoration magic used to treat the beastkin group attacked by Bard, as well as things like their knowledge of seasonings, were hidden by the elves’ wit.

The elven race was an intelligent one, widely known as having insular personalities. No one would even hold a doubt to her lie.

“Frank-san, good morning. Hector-sama is here to see you.”

“…Morning, Ilya. Haku too.”

“Pi!”

After that, she prepared black tea for them in the parlor and tried to run away. However—

“Ah, it’d help if Ilya stayed to listen as well.”

“…Certainly.”

Like the time before, she wasn’t able to get away this time either. Although they were her superior’s orders, she felt it wrong for a mere receptionist like her to be present in such an important conversation.

(Even though I’m not something like Frank-san’s butler or secretary…)

Their conversation primarily comprised of the construction work’s progress and the cost of hiring

people for additional construction. Another thing was guards for an investigation around Lunéville to study the monsters.

Monsters were a threat to all races, all nations would cooperate in studying their ecologies and capabilities… Be that as it may, they wouldn't release all of the information regarding their ecologies to those who weren't their allies. This lead to the present state of going to a guild for information regarding a monster's capabilities for practically any subjugation.

Though you may think that each nations' research facilities would feel ashamed from it, they probably didn't want to compromise their position. It was just better that they weren't disseminating strange information with empty theories.

When their business talk ended, the two proceeded into small talk.

Even though Hector and Frank weren't direct acquaintances, their careers held things in common. A lot of places other than Rondéville came up in their talk.

Since Hector built up a considerable amount of stress every day in the royal capital, he was more talkative than usual.

Ilya was doting on Haku since she thought it would be boorish to interrupt their conversation when there was a knock at the door.

Ilya walked over and opened the door. Coming into sight, Ria bowed.

“Frank-san. Aryune’s mayor is here to see you. Should I ask him to wait on the second floor’s private room?”

“Did you hear his business for coming?”

“He said it was about monster subjugation.”

“...If it’s alright, I’d like to attend as well. Do you mind?”

Receiving Hector’s proposal, Ria left to guide Aryune’s village head to the parlor.

Ilya stayed as though it were natural.

(Either way would be fine though.)

She would likely hear about it afterwards if it’s about a

commission.

Thinking to herself, Ilya made some black tea for the village mayor as well and moved to wait behind Frank.

Taking the signal, the village mayor started talking falteringly.

“Branch Manager-dono. Do you know about the presence of monsters surrounding my village recently?”

“Yeah. We received a subjugation commission for that, and if I recall it was registered as accepted at our reception desk.”

“…Yes. Though that is true…”

Frank and Hector each frowned at his vague behavior.

However, if what he was hesitating to say was what Ilya expected, it would be a difficult situation for the two. Judging so, Ilya helped.

“Did the same kind of monster reappear?”

“—! You knew?”

“No, it simply felt that would be something difficult for

you to speak about. Should we put out an emergency commission?"

"Well, that's..."

The village mayor looked down again.

(Well, I understand what he wants to say.)

"Though I tried to put together the funds from the village to put out a commission..."

"There are those who doubt that they were hunted at all the previous time?"

"—... Yes."

There were few monsters in the Lunéville region. If the same kind of monster reappeared so soon, it might not have been hunted at all. It was reasonable that people might think that and harbor doubts.

Even though it was impossible to deceive the amount subjugated in the subjugation book's system, there was a possibility that the Guild Association could be suspected of pocketing money.

"Then, this time we will show proof they were hunted.

As soon as you consent, how about we pay the intermediary fee and commission reward?”

“Is that alright!?”

As for who the village mayor was looking to, it was Frank, the branch manager, and not Ilya, the one who proposed it.

Though that was natural when you took their positions into account, his reaction was something not seen that often in this town and was something fresh to relish.

“…We’ll handle it as a special case.”

“Thank you!”

After village mayor signed the commission chart created after that and left, Ilya was asked for an explanation by Frank.

“The problem didn’t look to be enough to go that far for though?”

“Treat it like a sort of investment for the future. When the amount of monsters increase from here on, there will be more damage if there are people who are

unwilling to pay for commissions from them holding distrust towards the guild."

The two agreed with her.

However, Hector still hesitated.

"Still though, you think there's going to be more monsters in the future?"

"...It's likely, at least. The village may have trouble bearing it. You might want to think about some countermeasures, such as increasing taxes or taking a loan."

"To go that far..."

Frank wore a serious look.

(Ah, oops. Did I say too much?)

Without changing her behavior or tone, she continued to explain to the two as though it weren't something to be too concerned about.

"There's no downside to being prepared, I think it's fine so long as you keep it in mind."

"...Understood."

Though Ilya was trying to avoid fanning the flames of anxiety as much as she could—

(It's better than making it worse.)

She decided to think positively.

Part 4

This was the first time Katie had a respectable job and it was hectic enough that she felt dizzy.

In the morning, she woke up before the sun rose. She took a shower and dressed herself while fighting her drowsiness.

Walking from the inn she was lodging at with unsteady feet, she walked in from the staff entrance. The office appeared in front of her.

“Ah, morning Katie.”

“…Morning.”

“Morning-san~… you look sleepy. Don’t fall asleep while standing and drop the dishes okay?”

“I’m alright… I think.”

Coming out of the office, Katie headed into the dressing room beyond it.

Though she was confident in her endurance, she wasn’t accustomed to living a normal life among a

group of people and was more exhausted than she'd expected.

There was also a mental source for her fatigue as well.

For instance, that interaction with Desiree and Claude from a moment before.

She wondered if they knew what she did.

She felt guilty from deceiving them if they didn't know, and she couldn't understand their accepting behaviors if they did.

She couldn't deal with her own feelings and couldn't figure out a solution.

Even so, the reason she was reporting to work without running away was because of the order Ilya gave her.

Arriving at the locker with her name written on it in the changing room, Katie started changing into her uniform.

"Ah, Katie. Morning~"

"Morning, Ria."

Her change of clothes laying limply next to her, Ria

promptly put on her uniform.

Katie was troubled by being unable to get the string on the lower back through that well when it suddenly disappeared from her hold.

As she was trying to somehow turn around to see her back, Ria bent forward to help.

“Hold still a second.”

Probably due to her lack of sleep, her ability to concentrate had fallen so low that she didn’t notice that Ria had moved behind her.

“Alright, it’s done.”

Katie bowed to Ria, who was wearing a gleeful smile.

“I’m sorry.”

“Huh? It’s fine it’s fine. The uniform is cute, but I had trouble at first too. You don’t have to say thanks.”

“That… so? Got it.”

Next to Katie who was blinking her eyes, Ria closed her locker and headed to the office.

“Nee-chan, my order?”

“Coming.”

“Katie-chan, can you get the next one?”

“Y-yes.”

“Katie, take empty plates away if you see them while taking orders.”

“G-got it.”

“Katie—! Take this to table three—”

Going this way and that, she was kept busy.

So busy that she felt dizzy, she couldn’t find room to doze off.

If there was something close to relief for her, that would probably be her lunch and two breaks.

Fatigue dampens appetite if it's in excess, but you would need the power of magic to forget about eating the branch's cooking after eating it once.

"But you know Jimmy-san? Looks like he's looking to woo Ninonne."

"Aaa~h. My condolences..."

"He's looking at Ninonne-san even though it'd make his wife cry."

"Wooow..."

There was gossip being exchanged during their break in the office, but the only one who was uninterested was Katie.

Even she didn't know what kinds of conversations she would be interested in to begin with. Though she was struggling serving tables, it didn't look like the office staff had it any easier.

"Katie, good work today. Elizah's already arrived, you

can finish up."

"Got it."

The branch's waiters worked in three time slots, morning to evening, noon to night, and evening to night. Katie still wasn't entrusted with the busiest time slot of evening to night.

When she changed her clothes in the dressing room, a voice called out to Katie from the office.

"Good work today. Ilya said she would prepare a meal for you, do you want to eat?"

"Un. I'll eat."

Unhesitatingly agreeing, she would eat anything made by Ilya with relish.

Katie had returned to her inn after forgetting about her fatigue due to the satisfaction of her full stomach, but it surged back again as soon as she entered her room. She rushed to bed without showering.

Then, she realized it was the next day.

After that, she repeated a similar day again.

In an unchanging daily life, she worked without being able to calm her mind.

She wasn't dissatisfied. She even felt she was lucky.

Waking up early to shower.

Heading to the branch and changing into her uniform.

Waiting on tables and taking her breaks.

She finished her work and slept like a log.

But with every day like that, dregs accumulated in her heart and mind.

"Well, with today, your training is finished. You did well."

"Eh…?"

As for what the end of her training period entailed, she would lose Ria's assistance. Seeing Katie's pale face, Ria smiled wryly.

"It'll be fine even if you don't worry about it. I'll be in the dining hall too, just do what you've been doing."

"G-got it…"

What she'd been doing.

Guide guests to their seats as they arrive, give their table order menus, pass the order on to the kitchen… Katie repeated it in her head to memorize it.

"Welcome."

Coming to her senses from Ria's voice, her body panicked in response.

"Katie, what's today's set menu?"

(What I've been doing.)

"Sorry, could you take these plates?"

(What I've been doing.)

"Another helping sounds good."

(What I've been doing.)

"Ah, you, a moment?"

"I'd like to ooorder."

(What I've…)

"Katie——"

“Ah——”

“——”

(What I…)

“—”

“—”

There was the sound of something cracking. Katie looked down, glass had shattered directly below her.

“—ie! Katie! Are you alright!?”

“Eh…?”

In front of Katie, whose consciousness returned by being shaken, was Ria looking at her in worry. Then, she realized everyone around her was focusing on her as well.

“Alright? I’m not… injured.”

Ria exhaled in relief while Katie looked at her in a daze.

However, Ria frowned in the next moment as Katie’s body stiffened.

Although the atmosphere was quite different, Katie recognized their expressions.

They wore the expression of an adult just before they fired off angry shouts.

What they said if she disobeyed just a little.

What they said if she couldn't diligently do something.

When adults raised their voices, she would be beaten.

If she let out a voice she would be beaten all the more.

They would beat her if she begged them to stop.

She didn't want to be beaten, she didn't want pain, so she would frantically do as she was told.

Even if she was no longer beaten, she recalled the pain just by seeing others being beaten and would freeze from just hearing the sound. After she realized there weren't any children that couldn't do things they were told, she struggled in desperation.

As for how she had managed to live thus far, that was because of Bard.

While hiding it from the adults, only her companion

would come to cheer her up. It saved her.

Even that was something very small, like a spider's thread.

Even though she survived and became an outstanding assassin, she wasn't able to easily dispel her past trauma.

She made a mistake.

She was beaten.

She didn't want the pain.

She did what she was told.

So please, don't beat her.

Don't kill her—

However, the words put to her made her tremble.

"Come on! If you aren't well, take a rest!"

"Eh—...?"

She didn't expect it.

Katie was unable to understand what she was told and was forcibly pulled by Ria.

As for where she was taken, it was the break room next to the assessment room. She was made to sit on the leather sofa, still in a daze.

“That’s enough for today. The dining hall will be alright. Ilya arrived.”

Though it would have been hard to deal with if two people left, there was no problem with Ilya there.

To be followed up by the person she didn’t want to know of her mistake the most, Katie’s expression darkened.

“Are you tired?”

Towards Ria’s question, Katie raised her head that was hanging in shame, but immediately lowered to gaze.

Guessing her inner thoughts, Ria spoke cheerfully in a panic.

“You’ve been taking quite a few consecutive shifts after all. I’m sorry for not noticing even though you’re so tired.”

“N-no…”

Katie grew flustered by Ria's apology.

"I'm not helpful, sorry…"

"It's nothing like that!"

With her strong denial, Katie was at a loss from her unexpected reaction. She didn't understand why Ria would assert it so strongly.

"We've been helped so much by Katie coming here you know? Bard too of course."

Katie returned with an expression that seemed to say she didn't know. Ria smiled back.

"There's been more people, and because it's come to the point where we're exchanging our breaks for shifts, you've been a huge help… Though even if I said that, it seems Katie's been unreasonably overworked huh?"

"My endurance… there's no problem."

"Really?"

When she nodded while looking straight at her, Ria nodded in assent.

“At any rate, Katie coming here has saved us.”

She would remember that.

Ria spent the rest of the break changing the topic to gossip.

Then, when Katie decided to return to the dining hall after her break, Ilya came in after being swapped with.

There was a porcelain cup on a saucer in her hand, a vivid red transparent glass teapot in the other.

Although Katie tried to apologize—

“……”

“How are you feeling?”

“…I’m fine.”

She wasn’t able to speak that well. In the end, Ilya spoke first.

Despite scarcely having an expression, Katie seemed uncomfortable.

“Your schedule originally had a rest day tomorrow, but how about one for the following day as well?”

“Eh…?”

“I’ve worked consecutive shifts before. Though being able to only give you two consecutive rest days is shameful.”

Although Ilya was smiling bitterly as though she were trying to cover up embarrassment, Katie on the other hand was surprised. Two consecutive rest days. Guessing what those words meant, she was puzzled.

“…I’m not fired…?”

“Just that much isn’t enough to fire someone.”

“But… I—”

“Katie.”

She interrupted her pessimistic thought.

“Everyone fails. Even Ria, even Cynthia, even Elizah, we’ve all failed.”

“…Ilya too?”

“Of course.”

Ilya answered without changing her expression.

“It might have been different before you were in the guild, but you just need to try again if you fail.”

She just needed to try again.

Those words were said easily, but they were hard to take in.

Ilya somehow felt that Katie’s blank gaze stirred. She was staring straight at the teapot and cup placed on the table.

“If you fail, what did you fail doing… if you don’t think about it, won’t you be setting yourself up for it happening again in the future?”

That certainly might be true. She had no confidence that she could do it, and though she didn’t agree to it, she didn’t deny it either.

Taking her smile as though it said plenty enough, Ilya continued speaking.

“If failure was the end, your chances of growing up would just be wasted. Even if you’re fired to teach you a lesson, it would just have the opposite effect from what was intended by making you be nervous about

failing.”

Even if she failed, that wasn’t the end. Katie’s chest tightened.

Seeing her expression, Ilya changed the subject.

“This is the problem.”

“…Eh?”

She was perplexed by her somewhat cheerful voice.

“This time, why did Katie fail?”

“T-that’s… why?”

“Let me hear it.”

Her tone and expression were both gentle. However, Katie felt as though her path of retreat was cut off.

Why?

While she thought, it felt like her back was crawling.

She wanted to stop thinking, but then she wouldn’t be able to answer her.

Katie was rushing.

(If I don't answer…)

Rushing.

But unable to respond. Rushing more and more.

Just as she'd fallen into a vicious cycle—

"Alright, stop there."

She calmed down by hearing Ilya's voice right in front of her.

She was directly in front of her nose. Close enough that she could see her own reflection in Ilya's blue eyes.

"How about I change the question? What work did you do today?"

"Serve tables…"

It seemed as though her question was answered. Moving away, Ilya continued with her questions.

"Was today's work tough?"

"…"

Hesitating a slight bit, Katie nodded.

“I see. Were you tired?”

“That’s… a little, maybe…”

“From the continuous shifts? Consider taking less shifts then.”

“…Can I?”

While meager, Katie didn’t hide her surprise. Ilya laughed, “Of course.”

“Think about that later… For now, wasn’t there another cause that made you a bit tired?”

“…As usual, I couldn’t do it…”

Katie could usually do something if it was pointed out to her.

That much was clear from Ria and the others’ help. However, she wouldn’t be able to adapt unless she learned to do it on her own.

If you couldn’t figure something out by yourself, you wouldn’t be able to handle unexpected situations. But there was a way to fix the problem.

“…What do you mean by that?”

“That’s… when I get told to do so many things all at once, I don’t know which to do…”

By working while being confused after that happening, she’d suddenly just lose control.

Katie’s voice was small, like she were confessing a crime.

Still, that much was enough. She properly answered.

“At times like that, what did Ria and the others do?”

“Come to me, and ask… me.”

While she answered, Katie hung her head even further.

“Well then, do that next time.”

“…!”

Ilya smiled at Katie, who looked up.

“If you don’t know what to do, it’s not that hard to find it out. Take a deep breath, then try to think of how other people handled it. If you still don’t know, ask for them to wait a moment and ask someone else.”

She clasped Katie's hands.

"To avoid failing, try again."

"Again..."

Katie murmured.

"Right, failure isn't the end. Just make use of the mistake and try again."

Ilya looked straight at her. Seeing Katie look back at her, she slowly let go of her hands.

"But you know, it's better to not fail right?"

"...Un."

"Try and look to see what the other staff do when they don't have any hands free for guests."

"Others...?"

"Right, look to them. Watch and study what they do at those times."

This wasn't written in the manual, and Ria had forgotten to teach her this as well.

At any rate, what Ilya was saying right now was

something not unlike what parents told their children. To someone who hadn't learned it... or rather, to Katie who had been made to forget, expecting for her to learn so quickly would be unfair.

Could she do it?

Towards Katie's uneasy expression, Ilya smiled.

"It's alright. Bard-san isn't your only friend. Everyone here will help you."

"...Un."

Her consent was rushed, but Katie didn't take it back.

The next day, and the day after that as well, Katie visited the branch despite them being her vacation days.

Of course, her purpose was to watch how the staff worked.

Katie watched them, trying to learn. She discovered various things.

For instance, the day's break times.

Claude and Desiree spoke to each other casually.

She'd often seen the two chatting with each other while working.

However, now that she took a closer look, their hands didn't stop working at all despite them chatting.

When she understood, she felt ashamed for thinking the office work was easy.

To her, it was a world she hadn't seen.

Katie, who changed her perception of them, started to see the others more positively after seeing their great efforts.

Their industrious appearances were pleasant, too. Not only the spontaneity of the staff, but the people that came in as guests and cooperated with them too.

Then she noticed. When she looked around, her surroundings were brimming with smiling faces.

Smiles containing lust. Smiles stemming from an appeased greed. Smiles of those who tease the weak. All of the smiles she'd seen up to now had brought shivers to her mind and body.

But the smiles here were different.

She didn't feel a chill from them, they were smiles that calmed her mind.

"Thank you."

The voices that hung in the air from leaving patrons, their smiling faces, Katie didn't know how to reciprocate them.

"Thank you, very much."

So she bowed as she usually would to leave.

But this time, just barely, the corners of her mouth… had lifted a little.

Let alone her bustling surroundings, it was such a small change that she herself hadn't even noticed.

Before long, the bustling branch, as well as her bewilderment from some time before, were gone.

In an unchanging daily life, she worked without being able to calm her mind.

But now, the steps of the woman leaving the inn she used as lodgings as she walked towards an awfully

imposing building... were happy ones.

Part 5

On the afternoon of a certain day. Bard was in the third floor's office.

The reason why his expression was obstinate as he sat on the leather chair was because Frank was sitting in front of him.

He was being thoroughly beat down.

However, the cause of this heavy feeling was Frank's duty as head of the Lunéville branch.

Frank put the paper he held in his hands down on the table.

"Do you have any justifications this time?"

"...No, none."

If one were to talk about height, Bard was taller. However, right now his figure seemed even smaller than Frank.

"Bard. This failure of yours endangered people losing confidence in not only the branch, but the association

as a whole. No matter how much effort we make, we cannot recover that once it is lost. Am I understood?"

"...Yes."

The other day, Bard committed a grave mistake.

While registering a commission when the branch was packed, in a rush, Bard misunderstood and ended a registration before it was finished, returning the registration cards and commission chart.

Today, this came to light. The commission completion request could not be processed by the registration book. When the problem was looked into, the mistake was detected.

And thus the office staff were in a panic.

If a completion wasn't registered and someone received the commission in another location, the great efforts of the guild members that came to report completions would be wasted.

As a result of their swift examination of the problem, since the commission hadn't yet been accepted in other locations, they somehow managed to avoid

much trouble. However, in the case that a commission is accepted at the same time as it has been registered as complete, it is necessary to make a report that summarizes the reason in order to prevent fraud.

Since it was a serious matter this time, Frank would prepare the report himself as the branch manager.

It's not like Bard didn't understand that he was being covered by his superior.

However, he wasn't satisfied either.

Because the presence of whether or not something is registered on the registration card as well, guild members that have accepted a commission aren't responsible for their negligence at all.

So even though Bard's mistake could be summed up as primarily due to his inexperience, one of the primary factors was also the expectations Ilya placed on him.

Bard, whose concentration dulls when in crowded situations, couldn't properly asses guild members' abilities that well. And so, unable to predict the results, took extra time.

Guild members would get irritated by that and rush him.

In his haste, Bard would often return registration cards and commission charts without verifying them.

Bard thought that Ilya said too many unnecessary things, but that simply showed his immaturity. Therefore, Bard obediently admitted his failure.

Seeing him like this, Frank nodded in understanding and reclined against the back of chair, giving all his body weight to it.

“So then, what will you take care to do in the future?”

“...Verify them properly.”

“Entirely confirm its registration. And?”

“Properly concentrate on my work.”

“Alright, if you can properly do those two things, you probably won’t make the same mistake again. If you don’t forget about this failure, you’re likely to never do it again and grow more used to it in the future.”

Although his tone was gentle, his gaze was harsh.

Because even if this was something minor this time, Bard was made to understand that that wouldn't always be the case.

However, Bard had no intention of exposing such a miserable side of himself again.

Gritting his teeth, he somehow managed to endure Frank's gaze.

"...Sorry."

And bowed.

"Alright. Take care. You can go back."

"...Eh? Oh, yes."

After replying, Frank's attitude immediately took a one eighty as though he lost interest. Unable to keep up, Bard responded cautiously.

"...There's... no punishment?"

"You properly reflected on your actions. Of course, if you continue to make mistakes you'll be sorry."

Even if he took it as a joke, this wasn't the kind of situation where the other person could laugh it off.

Unable to understand not being punished for failing, Bard was puzzled.

Frank looked up from the report he was trying to write, smiling at Bard. More so than feeling kind, his smile felt reliable.

“Clerks, receptionists, waiters and waitresses, cooks… even though the branch exists because of them, why do you think the branch manager exists?”

“…To keep them in line, right?”

While saying that, he realized it wasn’t a correct answer.

“Well, that’s half right. To take responsibility for them, that’s the other half.”

“Responsibility?”

Bard couldn’t understand. In the thieves guild he used to be in, the responsibility for failure would always land on the person themselves. No superior would stand in for their subordinates’ failures.

For taking responsibility, the closest parallel would be

people pushing their failures onto their subordinates.

However, Frank's words were implying that superiors should sacrifice themselves and take responsibility. It was the complete opposite idea.

"The world isn't just the thieves guild. They desire power to obsess over gaining more power. However, it's normally different. One holds power for the sake of taking responsibility. Not just you, I will take responsibility for everyone's sake… Even though I say that, there are a lot of people that attempt to abuse their positions and line their pockets with the hard work of others."

Although Frank spoke with a wry smile near the end, his eyes were sharp as though to express his immense willpower.

Responsibility. For Bard, this was something he had only for himself.

However, would he take responsibility if Katie died?

Recalling the thing from the other day, Bard once again realized the weight of his actions.

This was something that he had absolutely never been self-aware of before when he was full of pride for his abilities.

“There’s no point in giving you something like a sermon. Just go to the office to apologize and thank them, properly alright?”

“…Got it.”

With a small bow of his head, Bard left.

“…Next is his language huh.”

Not quite catching the mumble, Bard descended to the second floor, continuing down to the first floor and quickly passing through the kitchen.

Without entering the reception desk, Bard, who had come in front of the office door, stopped for a moment with his hand raised slightly reaching for the door. He took a deep breath and sighed before slowly opening it.

Gazes focused on Bard. Although Bard normally didn’t pay it much attention, this time it felt like he was being overwhelmed with guilt.

“Oooh? Whatever could the matter be~?”

Claude came with a smile. Seeing that he was jesting, he most likely sensed Bard’s feelings of guilt.

Although Bard almost glared back on reflex, he held back his childish irritation and bowed to not just Claude, but Desiree as well.

“…For giving you trouble, I’m sorry… And, you… saved me.”

“It was nothing.”

“Take care next time okay?”

They blamed him. Or maybe they were ridiculing him. He thought that, but the two were smiling.

Nothing about the way they looked implied derision, nor was there any sarcasm.

“It was nothing this time anyways. You apologized properly and showed your gratitude, so we’re even.”

“You understood everything Frank-san said right?”

“Y-yeah…”

“Then in that case, there’s nothing else for us to say. Do your best.”

Saying that, the two of them returned to their work. Bard was dumbstruck. Did Claude know what was said?

“If you’re still regretting it, hang out with us after this.”

“…Huh?”

Claude grinned with a laugh seeing Bard’s questioning face.

“You drink, right? Sa-ke.”

When it stops functioning as a branch, the dining room’s atmosphere becomes completely like a bar’s.

In the second floor’s private room, Claude, Bard, and Desiree were opening some sake.

“”Cheeeeeers!””

“…Cheers.”

Claude and Desiree chugged down some of the ice cold

beer, and while the two were letting out some of their tension, Bard lifted up his mug. Seeing the way he looked, Claude grinned.

“Nervous since it’s two to one?”

“…Huh?”

“Wasn’t it the same when you were at reception? Today.”

He was urging him on. He couldn’t let it slide even though he knew it, so he gulped down his mug in one go.

Claude let out a strong voice of admiration and Desire stood up and applauded him.

Bard, who slammed his mug down on the table as though to say something, felt great. Desiree filled Bard’s mug back up.

Like this, it didn’t take long for him to get hammered. It didn’t take long at all.

“So, hey. You getting used to the branch?”

Claude asked while sticking some snack into his

mouth.

“How cood I!”

Though he definitely replied with a negative, his expression didn’t look unpleasant.

“I can’t doooooo it! Hate gettin’ emplooood… the heck’s with thaaat!”

“I don’t think Ilya-chan is a child that would employ someone without thinking about it~”

With a bit of red showing on her cheeks from the alcohol, Desiree spoke with a smile as she drank more fruit wine.

“Thas’ wat ya all say! Always with the smilin’… I’m jus’ tryin’ to live!”

“Well, we’re definitely easygoing.”

Claude agreed.

“The people in this town are all like that.”

“…Sheee?”

Smiling wryly to Bard, who was agreeing in a pout,

Claude continued.

“Easygoing, gentle, warm. That’s why everyone can smile. Do you dislike that?”

“…”

He didn’t hate it. However, he envied it.

He couldn’t get it himself. This branch’s members had the thing he couldn’t get, and he envied this town’s citizens.

Although he should be able to join them, he just couldn’t. It was painful.

“Even you could do it too you know?”

“…S’no use.”

Bard looked down to the table.

After all, he was a murderer.

In addition to that, even when he saw Katie break, he was a man that didn’t question his way of life.

It was thanks to Ilya that they could be in the branch, it wasn’t something they did at all. That didn’t mean he

wouldn't do something though.

A wall made of guilt. Before he realized, Bard parted with his consciousness.

"...Oh, he fell asleep."

Desiree tried pulling on Bard's ear, but there was no reaction.

While minding the sleeper, Desiree turned her half-open eyes to Claude.

"He drank too much."

"Eeeh. But you've just been egging him on."

"Well~ now~, maybe he's a bit weaker than expected?"

"I thought he'd say a bit more though~"

Him saying things would be an indirect improvement even if he didn't remember due to the sake, or just a plain improvement if he did.

Although that was those two's plan, it didn't go that well.

"That aside, these appetizers Ilya made are just evil!"

“Cooome to think of it, those are all gone. How about getting some more?”

“I’ll get some sake too! Ah, toilet first!”

“Make sure you get there, alright?”

“I know.”

Giving that simple response to Desiree, Claude headed for the first floor.

The first floor’s dining room was overflowing with liveliness and smiles.

Recalling the scene of how dead the branch used to be, Claude stored Bard’s wry smile as he complained in his memory and collected some more sake.

He might pretend to be depressed, but he expected that he’d open up soon enough if it was left to Desiree.

He returned to the second floor at a quick pace.

Part 6

As time passed on by, Lunéville was building itself up as a new inn town.

The highway servicing also progressed, and people like carpenters that worked on inn construction, merchants that aimed at selling off various goods, and blacksmiths from the industry guild each came from all directions one after another to Lunéville.

Everyone expected the association branch's dining hall and kitchen to get even busier, but it didn't end at just that.

"The registration has been completed. Good luck."

Bard was bowing courteously, holding the commission chart out without wasting any time.

"Don'tcha look like the proper receptionist?"

"Thank you. Please present your registration cards."

Before him was the group of five that he'd registered the acceptance of a commission from before. Receiving

their presented registration cards, he began the registration. His hand movements were no longer awkward.

“But there’s really a ton of commissions huh. There’s even talk about about there being more monsters, seriously.”

“Yeah. We can manage to hunt them though.”

Luke was out on break, so Ilya and Bard were at the reception currently.

“Pi.”

Ilya noticed the registration’s completion with Haku’s voice, passing the guild members back their registration cards and the commission chart over the counter.”

“The registration has been completed. Good luck.”

“Yeah. Cya, Ilya-chan.”

“I’ll come again~”

“We’ll be waiting.”

Just as she bowed to see the group of mercenaries off,

another commission chart was presented to her.

Guiding commission applicants to the parlor if they came, she would immediately create a commission chart while cooperating with the office workers. Receiving completion bonuses together with signatures, she would post the commission tickets onto the bulletin board. Additionally, she would also take turns helping the waiters and kitchen staff when needed.

Lately, Ilya has spent every day being very busy.

“Ilya, Ellie started their break, go back to the dining room if Luke comes back.”

“Understood. Katie, do your best a bit longer.”

“Un. Work hard.”

Although her tone remained same as usual, Katie’s expressions had become bountiful. Both of the two had grown quite well thus far.

Some time later after she finished several acceptance registrations, Hector arrived in the branch with a strange group.

The men who walked in behind him were each wearing coats that resembled a doctor's, with emblems signifying they were on a research delegation sewn on their chests.

Even in this world where various cultures mixed, their appearances reflected the differences. Although they didn't stand out, because they walked ostentatiously, the general public's impression of them was the worst.

"We've been expecting you. For the matter regarding the delegation's guards, I am instructed by the branch manager to guide you to the parlor."

"Yes, please."

However, at that moment, someone from the delegation raised their voice.

"Ooh! So there being a young dragon here was true!"

A human male ran up to Haku, hoisting his small body up.

"Pi?"

"Blue eyes and white skin...! I've never seen a dragon

like this before!”

“Mansel-dono, right now is…”

“So fussy! There’s a monster right in front of me and you don’t want me to do anything, what other reason is this research delegation here for!?”

The delegation leader, Effy Mansel, talked over Hector’s statement with force.

Meanwhile, Ilya looked at Mansel coldly as she understood his other meaning.

(This guy, what did he just say?)

Knowing that this country’s research institutions thought of dragons as monsters, she was amazed at how low-level they were.

“P-pi!”

“Such a rare specimen… just how much could we research it!”

She took Haku back from Mansel. If Haku was left with that man and went into a rage from disliking the way he was being treated, even just his tail would

certainly fracture the bone if it struck the indoor-prone person's arm. He didn't know that Ilya just saved him, but there was no reason for him to be hostile towards her.

However, Mansel's smile coarsened when he looked at Ilya.

"So the dragon's owner truly was an elf."

"Is something wrong with that?"

"It's nothing, I don't mind if it's a beastkin or anything. So, how much?"

"...I don't quite understand your meaning."

Bard included, several people's faces with good sixth senses all cramped. Ilya was desperately holding her anger back. Nevertheless, the incompetent person in front of her didn't notice at all and proposed an offer in a very loud voice.

"Our Rondéville's research institutions will advance no less than ten years beyond other countries' if we had a child dragon. Although a... person... like you wouldn't refuse something that would benefit

Rondéville's citizens, it would still be offensive to have you part with it for nothing. So, I will buy it for any price you name."

(This guy…)

Ilya's magical power stirred. The whole branch was clad in a barrier made from her magical power, so the atmosphere around them mirrored that change.

"Piii…"

(Whoops, not good. It's alright~. Don't get angry~)

Ilya quelled her anger and put on a smile to calm Haku when she realized he was whining weakly. She turned back to Mansel once more.

"I will decline."

"Wha—… are you an idiot!? A mere receptionist like you doesn't have a choice in the mater, I can have you executed immediately just by reporting to the king!"

He felt discomfort despite being protected by a barrier, his saliva spraying into the air. However, Ilya's expression didn't change despite once again being

affronted by him.

(The king, is it?)

She couldn't help but laugh in her heart.

"Do as you please."

Ilya had met the king several times, but she didn't remember him as having much courage.

Perhaps because he felt his last resort of insulting her in the king's name was inneffective, or perhaps because he felt that Ilya's attitude was belittling him, Mansel's clenched fists shook in anger.

"Y-you bitch...!"

"Mansel-dono, please let it go."

"So the lord is trying to interfere now!?"

Ilya, whose surroundings slowly filled with pittying eyes, exchanged looks with Hector and attempted to take them to the third floor for now.

"This way please."

"I won't wait on this subhuman!"

(Ah, that's bad.)

"Pi!?"

Due to the fuming anger surging across the first floor, Haku raised his voice in fright.

Subhumans… mock-humans. As a derogatory term for all non-human races, it was naturally a taboo since humans were on friendly terms with those races.

Just then, Luke, who had finished taking his break, returned to the counter.

Seeing him, Mansel's expression froze.

It stood to reason. Luke had come from nobility and was an acquaintance of the king.

Although he concealed his position as a noble nowadays, that didn't change the fact he was a noble.

"Luke, did you hear that remark just now?"

"Yeah. I did."

Luke nodded expressionlessly. Even though he was concealing his position, he wouldn't turn a blind eye to that. He couldn't possibly disregard it.

“I’m sorry to put you through the trouble, but may I ask you to give your report?”

“Of course. Rondéville recognizes him as a traitor and human supremacy advocate. Please give him the appropriate punishment.”

“That is enough.”

Few people were able to understand the meaning behind Luke and Ilya’s conversation.

Nevertheless, since she felt some slight gratification seeing Mansel tremble, the stagnant air filling the first floor weakened.

“Well then, this way.”

She resumed guiding them once again. Then, after confirming that there were no unrelated people in their surroundings— “Oh, right.”

She spoke to Mansel.

“This child isn’t a dragon’s child, it’s the dragon god’s.”

“Wha—!?”

Among the rustling delegates, Mansel’s expression

hardened with despair.

“I didn’t investigate into what you meant by ‘research’, but I feel you should have chosen your words a little more carefully.”

Eye for an eye. Tooth for a tooth. Use power against those with power. She would tell the dragon god. At least, it seemed he wasn’t foolish enough to not understand that.

In reality, she had no intention of doing so since it was troublesome, but it would be something like a death sentence if she actually did. She decided to have him learn from it, but the effect was even stronger than she expected.

Disregarding the living corpse, Ilya knocked on the door to the parlor.

Part 7

“Dammit, dammit, dammit!”

After leaving the branch, the Head Royal Monster Laboratory, Effy Mansel stamped his feet against the ground of his coach many times in anger.

Of course, the cause of his anger was a certain elf girl he met at the branch.

(Her eyes, they just won’t stay away…!)

Constantly appearing in his mind were eyes like those that used to look at him when he was in the royal capital’s university.

Looking down on him as inferior, full of contempt, people who would sometimes even look at him with pity.

Although he wasn’t a noble, he was a man that studied with great effort to be accepted into the university. That didn’t mean that he had no talent, though.

However, he lost in practical skills to beastkin, medical

science to birdkin, and again lost in pharmaceutics to beastkin.

In front of their specialized talents, he tasted defeat many times.

Mansel, who had put nothing but huge amounts of effort into tasting nothing but defeat right from the start, had his heart warp as the defeats continued to pile up, eventually becoming distorted.

(Dammit!)

Although the other people in the dining area were the ones to have eyes filled with contempt, he didn't notice them and only looked at Ilya and Haku. Still, even if Ilya's appearance was such that one wouldn't forget it if they saw her, that was trivial compared to the thing that caused her to leave such a deep impression on him.

He made two miscalculations.

There was a noble that was acquainted with the king, and Haku was the child of the dragon god.

(The way things are going...)

Despite his face distorting it anger, he paled at the thought of his future.

Mansel desperately attempted to think of something that could change his current situation, but while his gaze swam every direction in attempt to find some sort of hint, he finally realized that the outside scenery hadn't been moving for some time now.

He knocked on the door of his coach, calling for someone.

"What's the matter?"

"It seems that a guard wants us to change our route."

"Change routes? Tell him to not say something so idiotic!"

"Y-yes!"

When the driver opened the small window, he turned back to the guard to convey Mansel's command.

"Every last one of them...! Nothing but hindrances...!"

A short time later, a young person that he could tell was a guild member with a single glance opened the

door to the coach.

“It looks like some flying dragons settled down midway to your destination. You should change routes.”

“Flying dragons…?”

“Yes. Veluun’s townspeople testified. There’s no doubting it.”

“Nn…”

Hearing that there were flying dragons, Mansel hesitated.

There was some research material discovered at his destination, Dotoke Plateau, and it was something Mansel’s group had been looking for for a long time. He wanted to obtain it as fast as possible. However—

“Oi, that guy said flying dragons settled down.”

“Yeah. It looks like there’s a clan of them.”

“Then, aren’t there eggs too?”

When a young man surmised something that Mansel was wanting to say, he furrowed his brows.

“It’s impossible for us to beat them in our current state.”

He had eighteen guards.

Because it was declared that it was impossible with their current number, just how much of a threat was a clan of flying dragons? Nonetheless, the phrase, “current war potential,” also had another meaning, “current reward.”

Whether or not he knew that, Mansel didn’t draw back.

Far from being intimidated, he even smiled ominously.

“It’s not like you’ll need to defeat any of them. I just want the eggs.”

“But to take eggs without defeating any of them is a bit…”

“I’ll put out an additional reward. How about three times as much?”

“…”

“It can’t be helped then. Five times.”

“…If something happens, please follow up with the kingdom.”

“Of course.”

Mansel smiled. Of course. He didn’t plan on doing anything like that at all.

Then, Mansel’s group, who temporarily changed their destination, reached the town of Veluun at last. For Veluun, that was no more than a small town, visitors that spent large amounts of money rarely visited.

Although the town’s wallets were pleased with being temporarily favored by them, the male townspeople that talked with the guild youth felt uneasy.

A little while after that, a short while after Mansel left for the royal capital.

A man who had obviously spent many years working the fields noticed his son looking at something in the sky.

“Hey! Move your hands, don’t just idle around!”

“Pop…”

“Eh?”

“What… are those?”

“Those…?”

Multiple black spots flew through the sky. Although their altitudes and distances differed, they all circled round and round around the village.

Before he realized it, his son’s hand was grasping his clothes tightly. It was out of fear.

The black spots gradually grew large, revealing themselves as part of the species that could be considered above all other living things, a species of dragon.

“They’re…”

The father muttered.

“…Flying dragons.”

As the family’s pillar of support, he knew what the strongest existences were. More than just for himself, his expression was stained with fear.

On a certain day, some time after the delegation visited.

“Good morning, Charon-san.”

“Ah, good morning Ilya-chan. Sorry about the time.”

Charon, who had left early in the morning, visited Ilya. As he was in an unusually hurried mood, Ilya braced herself.

“It’s an emergency. A clan of flying dragons seem to be heading to the royal capital.”

“…A clan?”

“Yes. Some villages have already been attacked, countermeasures are already being prepared by the castle and association headquarters.”

Flying dragons… they had the least dragon elements, a dragon closer to a beast than to the lowest ranked wind dragon. However, as part of the strongest species, if a clan of them came to attack, it would be a threat at the disaster designated level.

Like other kinds of dragons, flying dragons held a

strong sense of territorial boundaries and wouldn't leave their territories unless something major happened. Their behavior was abnormal.

"Do you know the cause?"

"...It seems to be dragon eggs."

Ilya was at a loss for words.

"It seems the delegates came across them en route to their destination."

"...Without... hunting the parents?"

"Yes, although their guards proposed hunting them, it seems that they wouldn't hear it."

Although she had given Mansel her worst possible evaluations when he visited the other day, it looks as though he took yet another nosedive. His speed was miraculous.

As Ilya had been registered to the mercenary guild under an alias for some time now, due to the nature of the job's instability, she could understood the guards' judgement of wanting to make money.

However, they should have firmly denied it. They needed to be hunted even though it would be hard.

“So, why did you come to me?”

“I wanted to hear your opinion. The king and headquarters chief nominated you directly.”

“It’s nothing that much. If the cause is their eggs, please promptly return them. To begin with, why did the delegation take dragon eggs?”

“For some reason, the delegation’s leader seemed to want it badly. If Haku-chan was born from an egg, he might have thought a monster could also be born from an egg. Practically all of monster ecology is a mystery after all. Maybe he though he wouldn’t be executed if he clarifies something?”

(T-h-a-t-g-u-y...!)

That was just too stupid, the dragon species weren’t monsters. Besides, if he wanted to know about dragon ecology it would have been faster to discuss with Mithledge Kingdom. That wouldn’t cause problems to other people.

Holding back her simmering anger and dissatisfaction, she calmed herself down and sighed.

Incidentally, just what was Mithledge Kingdom? It was a country where its king was born from a human and the dragon god before Jean.

“If you want to prevent extra damages and expenses, please tell them to absolutely return it.”

“Undeeerstood! So, the return method?”

“We’ll secure some people from here. I’ll prepare a commission chart for it soon, so please just review it.”

“Alright, got it. Well, I didn’t get much sleep since I ran straight here. Night~”

“Have a good rest.”

After seeing off the sleepy Charon, Ilya called for two specific people. Bard and Katie.

“You two will accept a commission.”

“So formal, what is it?”

“Please return the flying dragon eggs to their nest.”

“”—!!””

Having received such a poor order fraught with many dangers, the two held their breath. Their reactions were quite natural.

Normally, telling such few people to go to a dragon’s nest would be tantamount to telling them to die.

Even two people with high abilities, if three or more flying dragons kept them company, they’d have no choice but to die from that point on.

“...Why, after all this...”

Bard muttered while clenching his fists.

“Because this is your punishment.”

“Wha—”

“You will be acquitted if you finish this commission. Both of you will be free.”

Although they were half-lost by Ilya’s words, they roughly guessed the meaning behind them.

“...Ilya, are you telling us to die?”

“Innocence through death… hah. You’re disgusting.”

It seemed like he was angry, but his words were sorrowful.

It hurt him that he thought she was beginning to trust them.

“You guys still haven’t grown up.”

“What did you say…!?”

“Don’t you understand why you both were caught? It’s because you’re both skilled at assessing things you know?”

As for what was visible to Ilya, it was their abilities.

Bard held the [Observation] skill. Although that ability was a high-level ability that was able to see through other guild members’ fighting abilities the first time he saw them, he couldn’t perceive Ilya’s threat to him when she caught them.

Although the [Concealment] skill concealed ninety percent, he should have been able to realize she was a threat with just the remaining ten percent.

So why?

The answer is simple. Even if he sensed it, Bard overestimated himself and didn't admit other people's abilities. If he didn't mistake himself and others' evaluations, he should have been able to proceed calmly a bit longer.

"Bard-san. As for having you learn how to work as a receptionist, it's because I wanted you to cultivate your discerning eye for people. Your art of killing your presence is first-class. Able to sense your own and others' true strength, you would be able to carry on calmly."

"...First-class huh, doesn't sound credible coming from you after finding me so easily."

He didn't really seem happy.

"I didn't say a lie. Bard-san, while erasing your presence, please take charge of transporting the eggs."

"Just... me?"

"Yes. Katie will be in charge of guiding the flying dragons."

Katie did nothing but stare at Ilya.

She wasn't suited for [Presence Interception], but rather [Presence Inference].

"As for having Katie being responsible for waitress duties, it was because I wanted to cultivate your self decision abilities. You are nimble and have excellent agility, as well as very sensitive to your surroundings. While understanding your surroundings, what do you think you should do? The present you should be able to figure that out by yourself."

"...Got it. I'll work hard."

(Even though it took so much effort to get them this far, seeing them for this last time is a little lonely...)

If she said what she was thinking, it would probably be a hindrance to them.

Thinking about things like that, Ilya looked between the two of them with an unchanging expression.

"There are honestly many more things I want you to learn, but this commission is urgent and there's no one else suited to it but you two. So please accept this

commission as you punishment. Would you?"

"Got it."

"...Can't be helped if this is our freedom. So, the reward?"

With Bard's question, Ilya gave him a full-faced smile. She made an effort for it to be forced.

"You didn't notice? No pay. It's punishment."

"N-no way..."

"Yes. You both will certainly be able to handle this commission. It wouldn't be a punishment if there was a reward, right?"

Katie smiled with Ilya's smile, while Bard's shoulders drooped. However, on his face that was hanging down, the corners of his mouth rose.

After that, she explained to them the route and how to go about how to induce the flying dragons.

Finishing the commission acceptance registration, she handed the two back their registration cards. Neither of them could hide their surprise about what was on

their registration cards.

“This, it can’t be mine.”

“These aren’t thieves guild…”

Right, these registration cards for Bard and Katie were ones that Ilya newly made for the mercenary guild.

“You were tied to the thieves guild with your previous cards. Since I think you both should be able to go and live anywhere you want now, please use them to start fresh. Ah, don’t you two go and misuse them alright? Also, the salary that you’ve earned so far has been transferred to the registration cards’ accounts. Please don’t lose them.”

“Thank you… Ilya.”

“…Tch.”

And so, the two people walked out of the empty dining hall. Ilya saw them off from the counter where no one else was.

“I sincerely wish for your safety and success.”

Leaving Lunéville behind, Bard and Katie walked

along the road south.

The two were travelling for the first time in a while, but neither of them felt like having a light-hearted conversation.

“...They were good people.”

There was no answer to Katie’s murmur.

However, she clearly understood that he agreed.

Recently, Bard, who had worked at the branch, was smiling more often.

What did a smile mean to her until now? As though chills spread through her body, it was a mass of repulsive feelings.

However, it was different now.

Lunéville was different. When she recalled all of the smiles she saw, her heart warmed.

Filled with good feelings, having her smile before she new it, it was a tranquil place.

“Ah...”

When she touched the thing she felt running along her cheek, she understood it was her own tears.

Even though she didn't feel sick, she felt a pain in her chest.

"...No..."

It was no use even if she said it, she knew that.

Even so, the words just tumbled from her mouth.

"...I don't want to..."

Each time she spoke, more tears spilled out.

It wasn't that Ilya drove them out because she hated them, she knew that.

On the contrary, she knew that she always thought of them, always trying to help them.

Even though she was so happy, her chest felt tight, it was painful.

"...I want to go back..."

As if a dam had burst open, her tears wouldn't stop falling.

In the end, Katie finally stopped walking. But right then, she felt something nostalgic. Bard's hand was lightly caressing Katie's head.

"...Bard...?"

When she took a closer look, his shoulders were trembling slightly, and he was rubbing his arm against his face.

"This commission, we'll absolutely survive it!"

"Eh...?"

He smiled at the puzzled Katie.

His smile looked like one a crook would have.

"She said it. We can live wherever we want."

"...Ah...!"

Even though Katie didn't understand at first, she let out a sound when she realized what he meant. She wasn't crying any longer.

"Let's go."

"Got it."

It was the response that she always used.

However, this time it felt quite different, suitable for the two embarking on their new stage.

Part 8

Having entered the uninhabited Veluun, the two people received some eggs from a guild member dispatched from the royal capital.

It was different from Haku's that they'd seen before, it was around the size of a basketball and was gray.

"The flying dragons?"

Toward Bard's question, the guild member nodded.

"According to the plan, they came here thanks to seeing the eggs. By the estimation, they should arrive at Veluun before dawn tomorrow."

"Understood. Leave the rest to us."

"Yeah, good luck you two."

After nodding to the guild member that clapped his shoulder, Bard and Katie checked their equipment before trying to get some rest to recover their endurance.

Then, in the dark of the night, the two began to

mobilize.

Katie went ahead into the forest, inciting the flying dragons around the nest. While confirming that all of the flying dragons with [Presence Inference], Katie took out a fire stone from her breast pocket.

It was something that was produced from the crystal pillar of fire, and by using the fire elements contained within it various phenomena could be induced.

Like a substitute lighter, or used for practical heating if it was a bit bigger.

The effect of the stone Katie held was to emit an intense light for a very short period of time. By throwing it into the air, it could be used as a signalling bullet.

(Alright...)

Seeing the signal, Bard, who was on standby in another direction of the forest, began his movements.

Of course, so that flying dragons and other monsters wouldn't notice him, he moved covertly through [Presence Interception].

Even monsters with keen senses wouldn't be able to find him so long as he didn't mess up because of his skill.

Although he was shouldering three eggs on his back, Bard continued forward without losing his footing on the multitude of tree branches and roots. Before long, he arrived at a large enshrinement made from many collected broken trees. He'd finally reached the flying dragons' nest.

After placing the eggs into the center of the nest, he immediately withdrew.

Bard, who had retreated to a distance away from the nest where the flying dragons wouldn't sense him even if they returned, poured his magical power into a fire stone, throwing it high into the sky and above the treetops.

(That's...)

Noticing the twinkling flash in the sky, Katie invoked a weak magic towards the flying dragons.

She once again guided the flying dragons, who had

been lured from their nest, back to it.

If she went too far ahead, the flying dragons might stop chasing her, so she couldn't lose focus.

Ever since storming into the forest, she had avoided areas with monsters and huge creatures with [Presence Inference], leading the flying dragons while making delicate changes to her course.

But just then, leafs fluttered down from overhead.

"—!?"

Those leafs each turned into two right in front of her.

At that instant, her [Presence Inference] immediately informed her of the presence of monsters nearby.

(Monster butterflies!?)

To be exact, they were moths, not butterflies. A monster named the rondlith moth. The moths' trait was that they lay in wait for prey while mimicking leafs by using [Seclusion], a derivation skill of [Presence Interception]. After immobilizing their prey alive with their poison, they would turn them into

seedbeds.

Those moth started flying, the poison stuck to them scattering into the air.

“Ku—...!”

Her legs, her body, wouldn’t move how she wanted.

She was light-headed. There was no one nearby to rely on. However, she thought.

What means of escape could she use to survive?

Looking around her, grasping her situation, she thought about the best route to take.

Her body felt heavy, the air stifling such that it wouldn’t enter her lungs no matter how hard she breathed.

Even so, she thought.

(She said, I can do it...)

Ilya said if it were her, she could do it. She judged so.

Ilya’s words were like a warmth that seemed to protect Katie.

And so, a resolute light shone in the eyes of this woman who wouldn't give up hope.

Her primary weapon was a dagger specialized for throwing and close-quarters combat.

Although she didn't have enough to fully take care of the rondlith moth, she still had many. If it was just to open up a route, there would be no problem.

With that resolute light... in order to meet up with him, she had to open up an escape route.

"Bard!"

Katie sliced away several of them with her dagger, breaking through the encirclement by creating an opening even though she was staggering.

Immediately after that, fire arrows loosed by Bard poured down onto the mass of moths.

Katie kept moving her body side to side, invoking the low class wind magic, Aeropressure.

A wind welled up in the center of the mass, carrying the flames and burning the mass of moths, blowing

them away.

“Katie!”

Having rushed over to her, Bard chanted the detoxification magic Antidote, removing the poison that was affecting Katie.

However, thanks to being strapped for time, they dashed away.

As a side effect of being forced to stay still by the moths, the flying dragons had caught up.

The flying dragons caught up to Bard, who was inferior in speed, letting loose breaths that were compressed air.

“Shit…!”

“—…!”

Although he just barely dodged, the breaths slammed into the ground and exploded into multiple shock waves.

Regaining his balance, though still staggering a little, the two had tacitly understood their respective roles

and took off in separate directions.

Bard gradually strengthened his [Presence Interception] while devoting himself to running. Oppositely, while steadily increasing her distance from Bard, Katie fired magic towards the flying dragons, drawing their attention.

By the time Katie's magical power was almost entirely exhausted, virtually all of the flying dragons were concentrating on her.

Convinced that his [Presence Interception] was functioning perfectly, Bard, who had withdrawn, changed directions in a dash.

Katie also increased her speed, and while staying outside of their attack range, guided the flying dragons to their nest straight away.

(Alright...!)

Then the flying dragons, who discovered the eggs in the nest, lost sight of Katie who was running away at her top speed. Since their focus shifted fully onto the defense and safety of the eggs, she was able to

successfully break away from them.

"...Haah, thank goodness."

"Pi?"

Finished seeing the particulars, Ilya let out a sigh of relief.

Cutting off [Clairvoyance], she patted Haku's head.

The two were free from now on. It was uncouth to try and keep an eye on them.

To say nothing of their salaries from working at the branch, in truth she also transferred this commission's reward into their accounts. They'd likely be astonished by the number in their accounts, but this was a justifiable reward for their final lesson.

(... I wonder if they'll be upset that I tricked them?)

Katie aside, Bard's angry appearance floated in her mind.

Several days later.

The lunch congestion ended and the association

branch recovered a little presence of mind.

This was natural, as Katie wasn't in the dining hall nor was Bard at the counter.

If she was honest, she wanted to raise their [Speech Skill] and other skills.

To Ilya's thinking expression—

"Pi... pi!"

Haku licked her to try and comfort her.

Ilya couldn't judge if Haku's growth was proceeding smoothly since she didn't know how long it took for dragons to reach maturity, but she felt the small wings that grew on its back weren't that far away from it being able to fly.

(So that he flies properly, maybe I should also go and fly together with him?)

While she thought about such a thing, Ria, who had just arrived, made an appearance.

"Ilya, Hector-san's calling for you. He said he wants you to come to his mansion."

“Understood. I’ll wait for you to change into uniform.”

“Thanks!”

When Hector called for her without Frank, it was usually for something commission-related. Thinking about it, she wondered if it was because the amount of monsters didn’t decrease at all?

The registration cards she made for Bard and Katie shouldn’t be a problem since they could make proper decisions, and it shouldn’t have anything to do with her ignoring the dragon god that periodically tried to get in touch with her.

While thinking about a variety of non-commission related things, she came back to Ria who had finished changing into her uniform.

“Thanks for waiting~. What about Haku?”

“Haku, do you want to stay here?”

“Pii~!”

He clung onto her and wouldn’t let go.

“Ahaha, it looks like that’s a definite no. See you soon.”

“Un. I’m off.”

Ilya and Haku left the branch. While gazing at the townscape’s construction progressing, she headed towards the lord’s mansion.

It seems that it was completely forgotten after they got used to him, but at first many of the people who came for the construction and such feared Haku. However, nowadays they were completely used to him.

It was already winter. While walking outside, the dry wind blew down from the Loa Mountain Range would snatch one’s body temperature.

Although that was something irrelevant to Ilya, who defended herself with a barrier, Haku was still not at the point of being able to manipulate air and didn’t have a means of defending himself.

“Pi~…”

“Come here.”

“Pi.”

She held Haku, who was stirring as though he was a

bit cold.

The lord's mansion looked the same as before. Although their were talks about newly rebuilding it in this redevelopment as well, Hector rejected it by saying it was unnecessary.

Although she would usually ask one of the gatekeeper soldiers if Hector was in, this time a maid was standing in front of the gate.

"We've been expecting you, Ilya-sama."

"Good morning, Sibyl-san."

Her hair was both light brown and black and her skin dark brown. She was a German shepherd-type beastkin with erect, tapered ears. Guided by Sibyl, she walked through the mansion's hallway.

Many of the furnishings were gorgeous. As for why they didn't seem to match Hector's reliable impression, that's because they were to the previous lord's tastes. It seemed that he'd decided to keep them to sell in case of emergencies. Hearing such a story, one could easily accept it as Hector's benevolence.

“You arrived quick, Ilya.”

“It was nothing.”

She was guided into the mansion’s parlor. The moment she entered the room, Ilya guessed the reason she was called for. There was another man waiting in the room.

“Long time no see, Ilya.”

“It’s been a while. I didn’t think that I would be meeting the country’s prime minister here. Surely you aren’t alone?”

While making the sarcastic remark with Haku still in her arms, the man gave a deeply wry smile.

“If I took my knights for a walk, surely it would just prove the height of my position right?”

This man was the Prime Minister of Rondéville Kingdom, Luciano Conti. As a half elf that had been managing the country’s government for two generations, it wasn’t an exaggeration to say that Rondéville prospered as a nation of many races thanks to him.

“Truly though, I wish the king would have been here as well. But as expected, the throne can’t be left open.”

“Ilya, why are you standing around talking? Take a seat.”

Hesitant to reject him, Ilya sat obediently and listened to what the prime minister had to say.

“First is the report. The eggs safely returned to the nest, it appears the flying dragons have successfully returned as well.”

“Thank goodness. I can finally feel relieved.”

Contradicting Ilya that appeared to be relieved, the prime minister’s expression was dull.

“Although we were also relieved, an unrelated matter immediately appeared.”

Pausing his words there, he leaned back against the backrest. This was something characteristic to him, it meant he felt helpless.

“…An ice dragon appears to be heading towards Rondéville.” Note 11)

“—…”

Hector’s hand went to his mouth. As expected, it was designated as calamity-class. It was a fact that had to be accepted.

“Has Akradist not considered any countermeasures?”

“As expected of Ilya, you’re well informed. So long as there is no personal damage to them, they seem to be leaving it alone.”

Akradist’s response couldn’t be blamed since it had left for Rondéville. There was a possibility that it would turn its attention to them if it was handled poorly and, with its insufficient harvest to send out its army, would have to send out a subjugation commission through the guild if they failed. It was sometimes necessary to endure things like this.

“With that, we will also pay careful attention to this.”

“It’s good that we heard about this so soon. It’s a small mercy the harvest season has already passed. Even if it approaches settlements to some degree, people should be able to take refuge. Each of the major cities should

prepare to accept evacuees."

"Yes. That will certainly be done."

Even though it wasn't yet complete, Lunéville was already shaping up as an inn town. It was also a former military foothold, so that should increase its sense of security.

However, that aside, there was something off about Luciano's story.

"In the situation where the ice dragon attacks a major city, what are you planning to have done?"

"Yes. That's what I'm here to talk to you about, Ilya."

The prime minister straightened his posture, turning fully towards Ilya."

"Ilya, do you know why the ice dragon is coming to Rondéville?"

His question was certainly reasonable.

"...Before, you said that the amount of commissions would increase, was this matter included in that?"

"Is that true? Ilya."

Toward Hector's words, the prime minister became interested as well.

However, even though the man leaned forward in response, Ilya's expression didn't change.

"No, that was different. I expected that the amount of monster subjugation commissions would increase due to the construction work. Although I had heard talk of an ice dragon, I never thought that it would come here."

Although the prime minister wasn't convinced, he was interested in something different.

"Why did you expect there to be more monsters? Lunéville's construction plans wouldn't be provoking the monster-inhabited regions. Is there something like a law for that?"

His eyes were questioning, like a youth's. With a half elf combining an elf's wisdom with a human's curiosity, his reaction was related to his many interests.

"The number of monsters increase along with the

number of people. That's all."

"I-is that so? Even so, I can't ignore that... uuumu..."

Even though the prime minister was lost in thought, Ilya wasn't going to speak about the details.

With their roots spread throughout the world, there were three world trees.

Ejected from these world trees were three primary sources: the magic source, the spirit source, and the light source. Eventually, it was the light source that brought forth daylight to light the world.

Then, when the flora and fauna absorb the light source through respiration, the primary source would transform into shadow source inside them. This shadow source would be exhaled, bringing along night, where there was no light source. This would be breathed in by the world trees and accumulate inside them.

Living things that can gather this shadow source, along with elements and the components of plants and animals that had returned to the earth and absorbed

by the world trees, these are monsters.

The cause of the light source changing into shadow source was because the light source absorbs negative emotions held by flora and fauna.

Thanks to the light source absorbing negative feelings, living creatures could be cheerful during the day. But during the night where there was no light source, negative thoughts would accumulate into masses of negativity, accumulating monsters.

It was easy for people to hold negative feelings towards others.

Eventually, since monsters would be produced by the negative feelings held by people, they would become aggressive towards people more so than to general creatures.

That's why in places and regions where there are a lot of people gathered together, they would emit a large amount of shadow source. It would increase the amount of monsters gathered to attack people.

(... It's impossible for me to say something like that

though.)

Her eyes downcast, Ilya let out a sigh in her heart.

Even though she knew everything, the Lottévester Faith that valued the world trees knew nothing about it.

“At any rate, the only uncertainty is why the ice dragon is coming.”

“Well, don’t you think it’s because there are a lot of people here?”

“Dragons are not monsters.”

Because creatures that attacked people were generally called monsters, it was a common misunderstanding in countries that had few chances of coming into contact with them. Of course, it’s also true that they should judge whether or not it was a threat. However, if there was a method of ending it without a fight, they shouldn’t especially attempt to destroy it.

“…That so? However, if any cities are attacked we’ll have to subjugate it.”

“…Yes.”

“While paying attention to the ice dragon’s movements, please pay attention so as to not neglect the transportation of goods.”

“”Certainly.””

Part 9

Ilya and Hector formally answered the prime minister.

After seeing everyone off, Hector summarized information on this matter in a document.

Considering, noting, and observing.

Even if the truth is hard to understand, when one improves their understanding by using those, they might gain a flash of insight. From his experience, this was a custom that Hector had practiced for many years.

“I brought tea.”

The person to say that presenting a cup was the maid, Sibyl.

“Oh, thanks.”

Taking the cup with his hand, Hector leaned back in his chair and took a break.

“What’s the matter?”

“…”

There was no response from her, but with her wry smile, Hector guessed her discontent.

“Is it what Ilya said?”

“…Yes.”

She responded with an affirmative this time. However, Hector wasn’t agitated. He had repeated that dialogue over and over in his mind ever since then.

“…It wasn’t anything personal.”

“I understand.”

“However, she has a lot of mysteries!”

When Hector was a knight, he saved the life of Sibyl, who was also a knight. She firmly believed that it was her duty to support Hector in order to repay his kindness, so she now served as his maid.

For this reason, the Ilya whom she couldn’t fathom the depths of caused her anxiety, it was frightening.

“She… still, didn’t tell you everything she knew.”

“Probably.”

His calm response caused Sibyl to be at a loss for words.

“Then even though she was giving advice, why do you think she didn’t say everything?”

“That’s… so that I could prevail… probably?”

Recalling his unease while saying those words, his words lost their strength by the end.

Thus far, he hadn’t seen Ilya attempt to improve her standing with him.

Although she followed Hector’s instructions due to him being the lord and Luke being the branch manager, she didn’t attempt to do anything outside of branch-related affairs. She would only act when there was a commission or demand for it.

Sibyl had thought that about her, and if her previous remarks were wrong, she would be the first one to admit the mistake.

“In my opinion…”

Sensing Sibyl’s unease, Hector didn’t refute her, but

rather began to talk about his views on it.

“Ilya, isn’t she matching our growth?”

“Our… growth?”

Towards Sibyl who was involuntarily repeating it, Hector nodded.

“When someone progresses too fast, one wrong turn can give birth to arrogance. Ilya gives us information matching our growth, warning us… leading us on the right path.”

“Leading… does she intend to pose as a god?”

Hector laughed at Sibyl’s dangerous tone.

“She walks the streets, laughing together with the people, sharing their pain. Isn’t that an adorable god?”

That, as a ruler, could only be called fortunate.

However, that ideal lord was something he strove for.

Rondéville Kingdom had little precipitation through the year and was a land of relatively mild weather.

A river crossed its territory as it flowed from the Loa

Mountain Range to the north to a caldera lake to the south. With its abundant amount of subsurface water stored throughout its territory, it wouldn't be affected by a water shortage.

So as an agricultural nation that made use of that, if you limited it to the royal capital that was a metropolis, there was an appreciation for plant cultivation in the upper class elites like nobles year-round.

As their culture developed, it came to the point that other countries that saw them cultivate plants made greenhouses heated by fire stones. However, likely due to the nutrients in the soil being different, they were only able to grow things that paled in comparison of color and size to Rondéville's.

So Rondéville's royal capital, that had accumulated an unshakable position in horticulture, came to be called the City of Blossoms with flowers blooming year round.

Besides being shipped to nobles of other countries, the cultivated flowers are also used for seasonal

competitions and are popular among noble women, so much so as to being to the point that even royalty from other countries cross oceans expressly to visit.

Abstaining from the winter show, a certain cultivating farmer held a signed document from Rondéville's royal family. He woke up earlier than usual from nervousness.

"...Today's even colder."

The man warmed himself while rubbing his trembling body. Because he couldn't use heating due to the flower's management, he wore a large amount of clothes.

The man went out to his farm and encouraged the flowers that endured the cold and tried to bloom, inspecting each one carefully.

Just then, something landed on his exposed nose. When he reached up and touched it, his glove was slightly dampened.

Although the man initially thought it was morning dew, his eyes widened in amazement when he saw

small white objects enter his view.

“This is… snow…!?”

It had been dozens of years since he last saw it.

The fantastic scene drifted down from the sky. With a complete change, the man returned to reality and ran around carrying poles and sticking them into the ground in order to take measures against the snow, taking off each layer of extra clothes he wore one by one and shielding the flowers with them.

Nobles were infatuated with the spectacle, children running around excitedly from seeing snow for the first time.

While cold knights made their rounds and children stood after falling over, in some respects they viewed the snow carefreely.

Then, several days after that.

Rondéville Kingdom’s royal capital, where flowers of all colors should have been blooming everywhere, was turned into a world of silvery snow by the snow brought upon them by the ice dragon.

In a corner of the private room on the branch's second floor.

"Well then, [Blue Sword] will be in command of the mercenary guild's representatives. Please present your registration cards."

The eight representatives that assembled nodded and uniformly presented their registration cards. Ilya passed the registration cards she collected to Cynthia, leaving her with their registration.

"Are there any questions or comments?"

It was a representative from the commerce guild, [Dawn's Furrow], that raised a hand.

"Who were the ones who left earlier? Two groups went to the royal capital."

"Those were Beaulieu-sama's groups. A report came from the royal capital the other day."

"R-really? What's the situation? How many people are being transferred?"

"One hundred and fifty people. Several citizens were

injured, though all from snow cover-related events."

"One hundred fifty… then, don't they need more blankets and food?"

"The transportation of supplies will be handled by the trailing group. Since the royal capital's residents were told to expect this some time ago, no one needs to bring anything other than the journey's supplies."

Don't try to make a profit this late in the game.

With that implied by her words, as expected even the merchants quieted down after sensing the mood.

One of them raised a hand.

"Who are you? You're speaking awfully clearly, but is your information authentic?"

"Yes. Being informed isn't limited to only commerce and thieves guilds."

Hearing the thieves guild mentioned, the person's eyes shifted slightly.

(Your occupation being listed in the status column as well was useful this time, right, [Wind of Falling

Tears]' spy-san?) By not providing feints or preparing countermeasures, the flow of the conversation after giving information would take a huge turn.

While Ilya would make the best use of her eyes to keep things moving advantageously, on the other hand it was hard for her to explain how she knew information that she shouldn't know. This was a drawback.

Although the latter part seemed to cause a bit of distrust—

"Ilya's information is accurate. We guarantee it."

[Blue Sword]'s testimony, as an A-ranked mercenary guild, dispelled their complaints.

Just as the man winked as if to say no one else would say anything, Cynthia came back with the registration finished.

"Is there anything else?"

A silent affirmation.

"Then, we shall return your registration cards. As soon as the seventh caravan group is organized, please

extricate the royal capital citizens… I sincerely hope for everyone's success."

Among the representatives that were leaving the private room after receiving their registration cards, Ilya called for two of the representatives.

The mercenary guild [Scarlet Twin Blades]' representative Grace, and [Blue Sword]'s representative Fidel. Although [Scarlet Twin Blades] was full of powerful members that weren't inferior to those in [Blue Sword], Grace wasn't suited for command due to her excessive personality.

However, exactly because Grace was like that, she could entrust it to her.

"Please have everyone from [Scarlet Twin Blades] be vigilant of [Wind of Falling Tears]."

"…Arrest them?"

"No, there's no problem cutting them down if you need. They would be a nuisance."

"Merciless as ever, Ilya."

With Fidel's bitter smile, Grace laughed merrily.

"It can't be helped if they're enemies."

"Yeah."

Although the subject was dangerous, neither of their responses wavered. These two's characteristics came about from acquiring various experiences and could figure things out even if they were left unsaid.

"My best regards."

""Leave it to us.""

While the two were being seen out of the private room, Fidel halted and turned around.

"We only decided to participate in the rescue groups because you were here."

"Haah..."

"Why aren't you joining that meeting, I wonder?"

By that meeting, she was probably referring to the subjugation group's formation that was being conducted on the third floor's parlor.

“Only asked because it was on my mind a bit. Sorry.”

“It’s nothing. I’ll wish for your safety.”

“Un.”

With Fidel’s exit from the room, the only people left in it were Ilya, Haku, and Cynthia.”

“I was also a little surprised there.”

Cynthia spoke while moving a chair back to a table.

“When Ilya processes commission acceptances, don’t you occasionally give advice? Even when they don’t ask. You only say something to people that would be in danger if they attacked a monster head on.”

“…Un. Well.”

Cynthia was a human.

Although their upper limits were lower, there were many humans that held all kinds of skills. In a race like that, with the [Observation] skill she forged as a receptionist, she was able to see through people’s abilities to some extent as they accepted commissions.

It wasn’t surprising that Ilya could see through people

like that as well, but she was at a loss for what to say with this timing.

“That’s why, there’s a lot of people thinking, ‘Will Ilya advise this subjugation group too?’ You know? People that you’ve given advice, and the staff.”

“It’s not as though it’s decided that they won’t succeed without advice. Even if they don’t know that.”

“Un. That’s right, isn’t it.”

However, Cynthia looked up into the air.

“I just feel a little anxious. Like I wonder if we’d be alright if we didn’t have Ilya~, or something.”

“Because I’m not defeating it.”

“Right? Ahaha.”

She knew that Cynthia’s laugh had no ill will in it. Even so, Ilya still felt like it hit the bull’s-eye. She didn’t want to participate in the ice dragon’s subjugation.

It was because the ice dragon wasn’t a monster.

“Pi…?”

It wasn't because she looked after Haku, who was a far away relative to it.

In this world where survival of the fittest reigned, she had no objection for people to collide against those that couldn't coexist. She didn't mean to say something like killing was no good.

To begin with, she, who had killed many species, had no qualification to say that.

—Just, if she joined, it would be different, like greatly shifting the balance of power.

As Cynthia said, Ilya would limit herself to giving advice when monsters were the opponents. For subjugation commissions that weren't against monsters, she wouldn't stop them unless there was a difference in power to the point that they would certainly die.

Only through killing would the world's gloom abate… she wouldn't hesitate in giving advice if it was demons or monsters that were themselves born from the world's distortion. But in addition, when it came to wars between humans, she would ignore them

without hesitating at all.

She wouldn't help since it wasn't a monster. However, what if it came to this town?

Unable to come to a decision by just thinking about it and not knowing what she'd do, Ilya let out a sigh.

Part 10

The ice dragon, which had remained at the top of the Loa Mountain Range a little ways off of the royal capital, magnified the damage on the royal capital by sending snow down to it on the wind.

The king didn't control the nobles that attempted to be the first to escape, so the knights that originally should have protected the people became the nobles' escorts. As a result of the knights becoming escorts for the city's upper echelons that were scrambling to be the first to escape, their fighting potential to subjugate the ice dragon became insignificant. In the end, even the royal family ran away.

The present situation was that the knights couldn't move far from Greizeville because they were babysitting them.

Accordingly, it was decided that the guild would be used to hunt it.

Pretending to be a caravan for the rescue commission,

it somehow turned into a subjugation commission since money would be paid afterwards.

(They're messing around~. Ufufu… Well, amateurs that interrupt with empty theories are hindrances too though. They're just for appearances.) With that thought, she realized it was the same as the prime minister's grumbles and interrupted herself.

"—Then, we shall return your registration cards. As soon as the thirteenth caravan group is organized, please extricate the royal capital citizens… I sincerely hope for everyone's success."

Seeing off the representatives as they left the room, Cynthia breathed out a great sigh.

"Finally done~"

"Thank you for your efforts. Though we finished a little early, shall we stop for the day?"

"No way! We get paid by the hour, it'd just get wasted if we stopped now!"

"It's alright. Today's duties also have a special wage, different from working until the regular time."

“…No no no! Don’t want to! I don’t like that difference!”

While saying she didn’t like it, Cynthia seemed to be a little worked up.

“How about a break for now, then? Wait a moment. I’ll bring some tea.”

“It’s fine, I’ll do it! Ilya can take a rest!”

As soon as she said that, she practically flew out of the room.

The subject matter of Ilya’s duties were certainly more demanding, but her stamina wasn’t exhausted at all due to her cheat.

While she sat on the chair and waited as Cynthia suggested, Haku jumped onto her apron.

Incidentally, this reminded her about her cat that would hop onto her keyboard when she was using the computer in her previous life.

(Haku also gives that kind of a feeling, doesn’t he?)

Putting the problem about the ice dragon into the

corner of her mind, she passed the time calmly petting Haku on his head.

However, it couldn't last long in this time of emergency.

"Ilya, you were here?"

As for who poked their head in from the door, it was Frank, not Cynthia.

"Did the meeting end?"

"Yeah, though, just troop ranks and formation. Concrete plans haven't been made yet... At least, it would have been good to know what kind of magic to use against it."

"I take it that there wasn't anyone who has fought against an ice dragon?"

Frank smiled wryly at Ilya's words.

"Such veterans aren't that readily available."

"Is the departure tomorrow?"

"No, we are waiting for Charon's report. We're getting cooperation with other branches."

As they had to climb the snowy mountain as well as engage the ice dragon in battle, she thought it to be a natural decision.

“Thanks for waiting~… Oh huh, Frank-san… Did I interrupt something?”

“It’s nothing like that.”

“Cynthia should rest too. You’re worn out right?”

“I-I’ll accept your offer then…”

They exchanged idle talk while taking a rest with some of Cynthia’s favorite green tea.

Though really, the majority of it was Ilya and Frank keeping company with Cynthia while she grumbled her complaints. When Ilya escaped to care for Haku, Frank sent her a glance as though seeking saving, but — (I’m sorry, I think it’s a superior’s job to give mental care to their subordinates.)

Making that excuse, she didn’t look him in the eye.

And so, the first day’s affairs came to an end like that.

However, the next day was just as busy as the day

before since the caravan was sent out. Miraculously, the highway's final developments were completed just the other day. Although all of the large-scale construction was completed, the completion festival that was scheduled to be after it was completed was, as to be expected, postponed.

Two days later, the caravans had evacuated each town's citizens.

Ilya, who had been distributing supplies to various inns, went to the lord's mansion after receiving a summons from Hector.

Both Hector and Frank were waiting for her in the parlor with pensive expressions.

The subject matter the two were talking about? The failure of the ice dragon's subjugation.

As well as the ice dragon descending the mountain as though to give chase to the subjugation corps—heading towards Lunéville, it was a fact that it was moving towards south.

"The ice dragon… is coming here?"

Hector's expression was stiff as he nodded in silence. Frank couldn't just sit by and continued speaking.

"With their exhaustion, the decision to withdraw was not a mistake. However, no one thought that it would pursue the subjugation group."

"Right. Dragons are a strong species that are generally aware of territorial bounds, but it shouldn't have gotten to the point of chasing a retreating enemy past those bounds."

"Yeah… It's currently being confined by guild members from Harville that are rotating in and out with each other, but it looks like it will immediately mobilize towards the direction of Lunéville the moment it can."

Ilya regretted not paying proper attention and escaping from reality. She wouldn't be able to understand its inexplicable behavior by just observing it now. If she wanted to be absolutely sure, she would have to look over the subjugation team with [Clairvoyance], not just the rescue team.

"By the way, it's been said, but this isn't something like

when the flying dragon eggs were taken before."

"Is... that so."

Frankly, if there was such a comprehensible reason like its eggs being taken, that would be good.

Even if the ice dragon had no ill will, it's true that it brought harm to people. It's also true that people directly struck out against it. As for who held responsibility, neither did.

The parlor was wrapped in a heavy air.

A knock broke the silence, resounding through the room. It was the human butler, Fabio.

"Hector-sama. The evacuation advisories sent out to the various places have been completed."

"Thank you... how did it go?"

To his master's question, Fabio lowered his eyes with a stiff expression.

"...It didn't go well."

It didn't go well. In other words, they didn't attempt to evacuate. Unable to guess the reason, Ilya asked.

“Are those that came from the royal capital complaining?”

“No, Ilya-sama. They are actively seeking refuge. However, neither do Lunéville’s citizens seem to be looking away from the ice dragon’s danger.”

She wasn’t able to understand all the more.

Even if they were unwilling to part from Lunéville, the town they were born in, living comes first. However, assuming they hadn’t truly lost their sense of danger, they may be able to be persuaded by the people that saw the ice dragon firsthand.

“Where are the injured people currently?”

“Since the transport group left from Willville, they should arrive by tomorrow.

“Is that so… Has the report already been sent to the other cities?”

“Yeah.”

Hector responded with an affirmative.

“They went to Veluun where there’s a liaison for the

king, they should be returning to the branch tomorrow."

"You know those guys well, too."

"?"

A lot of people came to mind so she couldn't figure out who he was talking about, but it should be easier to ask them if she was acquainted with them.

The supplies situation, creating the last line to start the enforced evacuation, and securing guild members as guards.

By the time Ilya finally completed all of these discussions and was returning to the branch, the sky had started to darken.

On the roadside, Ilya met Cecilita and Lydia. Although she found it natural that the two people who worked in the branch's kitchen to be leaving from the branch, from what Ilya recalled, they didn't have shifts today.

As Fabio said, there were people like these two that didn't feel like they needed to fret.

Although she wasn't really satisfied with that, she put on a pleasant smile so as to not worry them.

"Ilya-chan, you went to Lord-sama's place?"

"Yes. Have you two finished with your evacuation preparations?

There was a brief moment where their eyes blinked in puzzlement. Lydia put on a cheerful smile.

"No way Ilya-chan. If I ran away, who'd make the boss' food?"

"Is that… so?"

"…Fufu. Even if we don't worry so much about it, we'll run away at top speed if it gets really dangerous."

With the skills Ilya had, she could perceive the credibility of someone's words, no matter who they were. However, even without things like that, she could understand these two's lie just by looking at them.

To Ilya who couldn't seem to respond that well, the two smiled and continued talking.

“Besides, if the branch left before everyone else in town, they’d be sure to say stuff about it after all this!”

“We also have to hand over money for the commission that was sent out.”

“The… commission?”

“”Un!””

The two nodded. Then, with unwavering expressions —

“”For the ice dragon’s subjugation!””

They said.

“Umm… why would you go that far?”

For subjugating a divine beast that was at the calamity designated level, it was something that should be considered between nations and guild headquarters.

Before coming to Lunéville, Ilya had seen victims that had experienced disasters. There were people that didn’t even try to escape, saying that since it was their homeland, they would go down with it.

Stubbornness and resignation dwelled in their eyes.

But now, the eyes of the two girls before her sheltered what looked like hope.

Unable to understand why, Ilya involuntarily asked the two. Both of them answered with unchanging smiles.

“The same as usual you know?”

“Everyone loves it here!”

(—Ah, that’s right, isn’t it.)

She forgot. Or rather, she realized that feeling once again.

By getting mixed up in this and that, she forgot about the weight of those words: ‘I love this town.’

This town was loved.

Since this land had been lived on for generation after generation. Since this is the town they were born and grew up on. It wasn’t related to something like birthplace or stubbornness, it was an incredibly simple answer.

“There’s no helping it, then.”

The weight of the love was different.

The profundity of emotional attachment was different.

That's why it was unreasonably for her to say something like that to everyone's determination.

"Un. This time, we absolutely won't stop this time, even if it's Ilya-chan."

"Sorry."

Rather than rejecting them, their determination caused her to agree. Because she thought that, Ilya shook her head.

"I won't stop you."

"Eh? Really?"

"Yes. I won't stop it if everyone in the town wants it."

If it's the citizens' intention, she wouldn't deny them.

"Because… I also love this town, and everyone in it."

—So I'm sorry, ice dragon whose name I don't know.

The ice dragon's subjugation.

—This time, it's a commission sent out by the branch

from everyone in this town.

Ilya decided to aid the commission.

Part 11

The next day.

When Ilya descended the stairs to check the people who gathered, there were some unexpected people.

“Ilya!”

Brandishing a frivolously wagging long tail, a woman clung to Ilya. Since the person she knew wasn’t someone that would do something like that, she was indeed surprised.

“Katie… how?”

“I came back from Veluun a little while ago.”

Veluun. Hector’s statement from the previous day crossed through Ilya’s mind.

“Perhaps, were you the one to send the report?”

“Right. Bard as well. Come!”

She forcefully pulled Ilya and brought her to the second floor’s private room. Inside, Bard sat on a chair in a bad mood.

“I haven’t seen you for a long time, Bard-san. I’m happy you two are safe.”

“…It was nothing.”

(Even more surly than before.)

When Ilya wondered about that, Katie smiled wryly and explained.

“Really, we wanted to come back with a present of the ice dragon’s subjugation. But he’s embarrassed since it failed.”

“Stupi—, don’t say something unnecessary! T-that’s just… I just tried getting some money to travel with! It’s a misunderstanding!”

Although she thought it to be indiscreet, she couldn’t help but laugh a little.

“Present or whatever, I’m really glad you two are safe.”

“Ilya…”

Looked at by Katie, Bard averted his gaze. Although he could also feel his favorability become even more

extreme, he'd probably be defeated if he minded it.

"So, what will you two be doing after this?"

"Another subjugation commission was published right? We'll participate in it."

"We'd be troubled if Lunéville disappeared."

"Troubled… is it?"

Although Ilya thought they planned on making it into their base, her guess was immediately denied.

"Un. We want to work here again."

"…You need more helping hands yeah?"

"Bard isn't honest with himself."

"Shaddup."

They certainly didn't have enough people, and it would just get more hectic after this.

Even though it would be a great help, Ilya turned to smile at the two.

"Eh, so you two will properly receive the examination this time?"

“Geh…”

“…Can we pull some strings?”

If it’s these two, they could probably pass it. But that said, spoiling them wouldn’t help them at all.

“For your positions, please do your best with your own efforts.”

If they could do that, they wouldn’t need to feel inferior or like they were being sympathized with anymore.

Since Ilya had an inferiority complex due to her cheat, she prayed that the two would want to build equal relations with everyone.

Katie, together with Bard, headed towards the branch’s dining hall. It was packed full of guild members that came to apply for the second subjugation group.

Including [Blue Sword] and [Scarlet Twin Blades] that returned from the rescue commission, there were some considerably powerful people gathered together.

Normally, the branch's patrons and guild members would be getting dead drunk, but currently everyone held serious expressions.

(Everyone should continue on the same as always though…)

She swallowed back those words before they left her mouth.

"First, for everyone that gathered here, I thank you."

"Pi."

Standing on the counter, Haku bowed his head mimicking Ilya. The tension in the dining hall softened slightly.

"For this subjugation, even though I am unworthy, I will propose the measures to take. I am sorry, but only those who do not object to the plan can participate in the second subjugation group, so if you do please—"

"Don't say so many unnecessary things, Ilya!"

"Right, right! Ilya-chan is too cold!"

Some people raised their voices. Everyone looked

towards Ilya with similar expressions.

(Nooo… I'll be troubled if you put so much faith in me… There's no choice but to brace myself is there?)

Strengthening her resolve, Ilya looked over the dining hall once again.

"Thank you. Then for the plan this time, forget about grouping people by their parties. Everyone will form groups depending on their roles."

Everyone stared at her with considerably surprised expressions.

In this world, although there were things like parties with multiple warriors in them, people didn't organize themselves for battles by role.

"First, please separate yourselves according to the roles written here."

There were two sheets of paper on the bulletin board that usually had commission charts affixed to it.

One sheet had organization plans.

People who use fire magic. People who use no less

than intermediate defensive-type magic. People who use shields. People who take charge of attacking directly. People who are confident in their speed.

Each of these were assigned to A, B, C, D, and E. By the way, when Ilya writes things down, since everything is converted into this world's characters even if she writes in Japanese, there's no problem.

"Next, I will explain everyone's roles and how to work together."

The second sheet had a simplified ice dragon sketched on it.

"First, the front line will wait on standby outside of the ice dragon's range for the battle to develop. If it is attacked by fire magic, it won't just damage it efficiently, but also cause the exhausted ice dragon, which doesn't like disturbed air currents, to descend on to the ground. From there, approach while keeping formation. Having done that, the ice dragon will use its breath attack to sweep everyone away at once. However, since the breath will be spread out in a wide range, this can be sufficiently defended against by

using intermediate level defensive magic. Then, group B will be in charge of using defensive-type magic on the vanguard's advancing formation."

Among the few people making noises, one of them raised their hand.

"What would we do if it uses an attack that isn't its breath?"

"Take formation to restrict its attacks. It will begin to use Blizzard if it develops to a point where it is surrounded, and attempt to skewer those who group up too much with Glacial Lance. As for the former, since everyone will force against it with tough defenses and it will have limited view, it is impossible. Though a similar strategy could be employed for the latter if advanced magic was used as well, it will be fixated on using its breath after being attacked since it is long ranged."

Without hesitation, Ilya continued explaining.

"Since Blizzard and Glacial Lance are magics that use natural elements, the ice dragon won't be able to move immediately after. On the other hand, its ice breath is

a combination its body's elements and magic source. Even if it only takes a few seconds to raise its neck and unite them inside its body again, it still takes time. Everyone, I would like you to approach during that opening."

"But that guy doesn't just have those three things."

Agreeing to the comment someone spoke, Ilya pointed at the figure once again.

"That's where groups B and C come in. While group A starts the attack at long distance, groups B and C will fortify the sides and group D will rush straight ahead. For its tail and forelegs' claws, groups B and C will defend the side that is attacked. Attack in that interval, with everyone possible taking aim at its horn. Ah, except those using shields, please place importance on keeping your shields raised. Bodies might be blasted back from the front line."

Several people smiled wryly at her remark.

Since taking a direct hit was destined for those equipped with shields, they were probably thinking back on personal experiences.

“Aim at its horn? Not the eyes?”

“Yes. Although the basics of subjugation is to aim at the eyes, pay that no heed and forget it this time. I’ll explain the reason next, so please aim at its horn as I previously explained. An ice dragon’s horn acts like a mage’s staff.”

Told that fact by Ilya, the dining room because noisy with people’s mutters.

A staff made the invocation of magic easier and more efficient, along with increasing its strength. As this was common sense for those here belonging to the guild, she omitted explaining it.

“If you can break its two horns, you can inhibit it from using its special attacks.”

“So, what about the last group?”

“Group E’s role is to create diversions and feints. Although I spoke about ignoring its eyes a moment ago, if you’re inside a blizzard caused by an ice dragon, do you know why you’d be helping your enemy? Bard-san?”

“Ah!? Uh, err… smell, or something?”

“That’s a miss.”

Towards Bard that looked frustrated, Ilya thanked him in her mind for answering as she expected.

“The reason ice dragons are able to understand where their enemies are despite having poor vision is because they sense temperatures. Therefore, group E will confuse—or rather, guide—the ice dragon by carrying fire stones.”

Then, the ice dragon would be perturbed.

The people gathered weren’t amateurs that needed to have everything explained to them from start to finish. She omitted explaining that as well.

“I’d like to see and divide the people for each formation for before and after the horns are broken. Based on this here, please forget about your parties and divide into the role that fits you best. If you don’t know which to choose, I will assign you.”

She bowed as she finished saying that. Taking that as the signal, everyone began to shuffle around.

“Piii…”

When Haku licked the hand that was holding him, Ilya expressed her gratitude and pat him on the head.

(It’s alright, I don’t regret it. Besides, I will absolutely protect you.)

For people that consulted her about their role, she assigned them based on their status by using [God’s Eyes]. She would have assigned them based on their potential if there was time in order to improve their skills, but it’d be unreasonable to demand that from guild members, which weren’t soldiers, so she decided to instead be businesslike.

Then after deciding the commander of everyone after the horns are broken and the squad leaders when the horns haven’t broken, she finished the commission registration after obtaining everyone’s acknowledgement.

“Well then, I will return your registration cards. Because [Pastoral Wheel] will be accompanying you to transport supplies when you leave, please join with them at the north gate… Good luck.”

“Let’s go!”

“““““““Yeeeeeeaaaaaahhh!”””””””

In this way, the second ice dragon subjugation group departed.

Part 12

When the subjugation group left Lunéville and had walked for a while, they noticed snow falling from the sky.

It was obviously the ice dragon's meddling. Although they were surprised that they were closer to it than they thought, none of them trembled.

The subjugation group sent out scouts and advanced, waiting for the report.

They decided to make their battlefield a plain, waiting for the ice dragon at a spot not far from their camp.

The fluffy snow gradually turned into something heavier and less refined.

Since there was little wind and a lower temperature than usual that day, the snow accumulated at the subjugation group's feet. However, considering that the first subjugation group had to combat it on a snowy mountain, this could be called exceptional conditions.

Before long, a black object appeared in the sky above

the quiet plain.

“Mage group, prepare yourselves!”

The guild members that were in charge of blasting it out of the air with fire magic began to move.

“Katia, I’ll leave it to you!”

“Un!”

Receiving Elivia’s support, Katia responded with a reassuring nod.

An ice dragon.

When she heard about the invasion, she didn’t think about something like leaving town. That didn’t mean that she didn’t feel afraid though.

The head of the magic guild that she went to was Mithledge’s king, a dragonkin. And since a branching line from the king showed her their strength and dragon form, she held a stronger fear towards dragons than others.

When she heard that it was in Akradist, she made certain to not approach it as much as possible.

When someone like her heard about the ice dragon's invasion, she spoke with her partner, Elivia.

Elivia also didn't intend to passively escape.

She wanted to defend this town.

Equivalent to when she said that she wanted to leave her hometown—or perhaps even greater than that—the strength in the woman's gaze said so.

Katia was the noble daughter of the Windia Federation's patriarch.

The woman, who yearned for the mage named Marinera that belonged to the federation army's magic unit, joined the magic guild to chase after his footprints and learned magic.

Developing her original talent with great effort, the woman returned to the federation with plenty of self-confidence. However, when she attempted to join the army's magic unit, she was turned down.

Rather than letting her leave to gain achievements in the army, the girl's family wanted to improve the house's strength by marrying her into a distinguished

family.

That was raison d'etre Katia's parents placed on her life. Katia's wishes were wholly crushes by her house's influence.

—I decided to leave my house… Here, no one knows who I really am.

Katia spoke to Elivia, inviting her to travel with her.

Elivia didn't feel significance in being attached to the federation army, which was firmly rooted as a male-dominated area. Recognizing her own strength, she wanted to go out and travel to find a place where she could make use of it.

(I found that place, didn't I?)

After casting down her eyes as her mood began to flood with sentimentality, Elivia opened her eyes and put on an aggressive smile.

As for the answer to Katia's invitation, she had already decided before even being asked.

"—Fast is the wind of swift sleep. Clad yourself in the

flames of hell, bringing extinction to those before you."

"—Accumulate, boil, seethe. Progenitor whose fire is more wrathful than a fire dragon's. Burn everything."

"—Destroy and warp that specific location. Extinguish all living things. Send them death and corrupt their very shelter of life."

"—Lights Out!"

"—Flame Breath!"

"—Blazing Destruction!"

Speed, range, power.

Changing the magic they used based on range and speed, they assaulted the ice dragon the air.

However, dragons could be called rulers of the sky, and as such only a handful of the spells were direct hits.

Even so, it was enough for the ice dragon to let out a roar in irritation. It glided down from the air and landed on the ground.

The snow that accumulated seemed to fly up vertically

from the vibrations, creating what appeared to be a wall of pure white.

The ice dragon was at a distance where it could be seen perfectly, one of its eyes and arms were injured. It was clear by the way the cuts looked that they were not caused by magic.

It was a happy miscalculation for the subjugation group, there were even people who smiled among them.

However, the real thing started from there.

“Start the strategy! Do not fall out of ranks!!”

The guild members’ expressions tightened from the order given by Fidel, the [Blue Sword] representative that was appointed as commander, who was filled with tension. All at once, everyone released their war cries and started their advance.

As for the mages who shot it with fire magic and resumed moving, they were waiting for the other groups to pass.

Katia exchanged glances with her partner that ran

past her towards the ice dragon.

—Good luck, it's my turn next.

—I'll be expecting you.

With their intentions mutually transmitted in that instant, there was no uneasiness in Katia as she watched Elivia's back growing ever farther away.

Even though it only had a single eye, since it didn't just use sight to fight its enemies but also heat, it didn't have to do something like concentrate on a single side.

The subjugation group advanced towards the front of the ice dragon. Exactly as Ilya said it would, everyone saw it raise its head.

"Defensive magic! Deploy!!"

The mages in charge of this invoked defensive magic to defend the trailing troops from its breath.

"Offensive magic group!"

"A little longer... now!!"

They began to chant.

“Defensive group, assault group, prepare formation and standby!”

“Mage group, invoke when the breath ends!”

The white pressing against the blue wall safeguarding them ended. In the next moment, as Ilya said, although the ice dragon roared, its attacks stopped.

“Shoot!!”

“Charge!!”

While letting out voices like the rumbling of the earth, the subjugation group dashed towards the ice dragon.

To the mobile group’s birdkin observing from overhead, it looked like three spears were being thrown towards the dragon.

Right, left, and center.

Realizing enemies were rushing at it, the ice dragon lashed out with its tail to mow everyone down.

However, its trajectory shifted the instant before it hit and was only able to do was stop the group on its right.

Its breath had been held back. Having recognizing this,

the ice dragon changed to using elements outside of its body after finishing its breath. This was it, it was time to end it.

It roared at the front line.

Magic that could emit numerous ice spears as though to skewer everything, this was the ice dragon invoking Glacial Lance.

It was an unexpected action. However—

“I won’t let you!”

A certain tiger beastkin headed towards the ice dragon that lifted its head.

“Dropping Phoenix Rotation!!”

The main point of the axe kick was making use of one’s vertical rotation to kick. Blades were attached to the claws on her feet.

Glinka-style claw technique, Dropping Phoenix Rotation.

Although it certainly made contact with its horn, it was far off destroying it. But even so, it wasn’t over

yet.

“Duaaal Faaangs!!”

Dropping Phoenix Rotation, Paired Fangs.

Rotating once again without losing any of the rotational energy, she attacked with the claws of both of her hands that were crossed over each other.

The slash that had built up momentum caused three grooves to be cut into its right horn.

“Tch—!”

A little more.

Even if she was irritated at the horn’s strength, she didn’t attempt to just randomly attack it. She withdrew from there by kicking off from its face.

Elivia was vigilant and thought that there would be an attack from the ice dragon, but there were no signs of it.

However, openly making their way past her, she saw someone spring towards the dragon.

With their violet hair and red armor, there was no

mistaking this person as [Scarlet Twin Blades]' Grace. However, she wasn't holding her usual short sword, it was a hammer that had a quadrangular pyramid as its head on one side.

A black-haired woman followed behind her, also from the [Scarlet Twin Blades]. Olga. She was also using the same type of hammer as Grace.

(What do they intend to do?)

When she thought that, Grace's voice slammed against Elivia's ears.

"Barrage!!"

Beating against the horn with the pointed tip of the hammer's head—

"Breeeak!!"

Olga, who had little time to react, slammed the flat side of her hammer against the one's flat side.

The grooves that were gouged out of it by Elivia spread without any of the impact being wasted, cracking the horn together with a shrill noise.

“Olga!!”

When Grace threw away the hammer in her hand, she pulled out a sword that was on her back.

Olga caught the thrown hammer, swinging them at Grace as one would with dual katanas.

Not to attack her comrade.

Lacking power, it was to forcibly allow Grace, who should have fallen down, to attack the ice dragon another time.

“Crescent Moon! Upper Arc!”

The upward arc slash directly hitting the horn’s crack —

“———!!”

At last, the horn had broken.

The ice dragon’s shriek shook the air and assaulted the surrounding subjugation groups.

But that didn’t mean the girls in mid-air couldn’t ward off the attack. In front of the three who barely managed to land while losing their balance, comrades

equipped with shields forced their way through and stood between them and the ice dragon.

“You guys went too far ahead.”

“Sorry, sorry.”

While the girls aimed at destroying the horn, the other groups focused on attacking it directly didn’t exactly cross their arms and wait.

Rather, since the ice dragon was concentrated on the girls’ attacks, they attacked parts like its legs and feet so that it wouldn’t attack the girls.

“But you did a good job.”

Since it was large, they could limit their targets.

All the more since they were fighting an opponent this large.

“People aiming at the remaining horn, be proactive! The defensive magic group will obstruct its attacks! Concentrate on its legs!”

Fidel’s voice resounded across the plains.

Because of the wind that intensified without any

relations to the ice dragon, the snow took away even more stamina and ability to think from the subjugation group.

In that situation, the young person named Fidel was an existence that was a huge support to the subjugation group.

Seeing opportunities, he indicated where to go with his sword.

Getting Ilya's strategic hints, she deliberately limited them to attack methods that formed gaps for defense.

Attack, defend, feign, evade.

"Haha!"

Fidel laughed.

It wasn't a sadistic smile, it was a smile birthed from being excited to the point of trembling.

For him, who believed in freedom, it was painful to be named as the leader and entrusted with the resulting obligations.

However, it was different now.

Under the name of freedom, the subjugation group stood up to defend their freedom.

Everyone moved as one, a feeling of being almighty stirred within him.

Although it could possibly be a dangerous mental state where one could develop a desire to rule, for all that, because of his purpose, he simply concentrated on defeating the enemy before him.

—With everyone's strength, we will defend our towns!

With a blow, another horn broke.

It was an arrowhead that decided it.

(A signal!?)

Fidel and several others noticed a light blinking in an entirely unrelated direction.

After a moment, they realized it was a magic light.

A fire spell came flying in towards the ice dragon before long, burning its wing.

However, the ice dragon wasn't the only one unable to

react to the unexpected attack, the subjugation group was the same.

Their ranks fell into disorder, instantly causing further adverse effects on their judgement. Since it affected too much of the leadership, the backlash was huge.

As for who clearly understood the situation, it was the birdkin throwing fire stones from the sky as feints.

As for what he caught through the obstructing snow, it was a wave of people coming to attack from another direction.

They might have been a subjugation group sent by another town.

The moment he considered that.

(Oh no!)

Having reached the point of being surrounded, the ice dragon started to invoke a spell that would attack everyone around it.

Although he attempted to disturb its concentration with the stones in a panic, he didn't make it in time.

With even the mobilization of the forces on the ground being late, they couldn't obstruct its magic—looking towards the sky, the ice dragon roared.

The high-ranked magic spread out like a wall of raging ice and snow in all directions—Blizzard was invoked.

Top to bottom, left to right, front to back. They were attacked from every direction. There was no way to completely defend against it.

"Defensive magic users, make groups of four people! People nearby stay in the center for refuge!!"

Sustaining injuries, the subjugation group's stamina lowered even further.

The ice dragon attacked some groups with its forelimbs and tail, each time reducing their fighting potential.

People didn't fall into being useless for combat due to the strenuous efforts of the defense group, so that was a small relief.

(((End soon...!)))

Different from the confused reinforcements that attacked as they arrived, Lunéville's subjugation group enhanced their concentration so as to not miss their chance for a counterattack.

Before long, the wall of white formed by the Blizzard began to break apart.

"Attack!"

That word.

With that word from Fidel, the group in charge of diversions and feints charged out from inside the defensive walls.

Taking a formation around it, people who knew how powerful Blizzard was would see it as suicidal.

However, they had knowledge.

[In the unlikely event where it invokes Blizzard happens, please move before its effect has fully completed. Although both the power and range of an ice dragon's Blizzard are astounding, it can not invoke it multiple times. Although it would depend on your current exhaustion, if it uses it, you should close the

distance all at once before the effect ends.]

That is what Ilya said. They had no reason to doubt her.

Surrounded by the movement of the scattering subjugation group, the ice dragon wasn't able to make its next move.

Those that had continued to sharpen their fangs in wait wouldn't possibly miss this chance.

First was its horn.

"Mage group!"

Together with the commencing chants, agile people dashed out from inside the defensive magic.

Magic was invoked.

The ice dragon wasn't able to approach nor give a decisive blow towards the mages that knew the significance of a blindfold.

Then the subjugation group's blades finally broke the horn.

Afterwards, the ice dragon was unable to unleash an

accurate attack having lost its horn. In the end, it collapsed onto the fallen snow and died. With its unmoving giant figure and the snow falling down on the plains, the noise that had continued thus far was as though it were a lie.

"…—id it."

"""We wooooooooon!"""

The subjugation group exchanged looks with each other while in half amazement, their hands quivering from various emotions, and giving triumphant shouts towards the sky.

People smiled, people wept, and people fell to the ground.

There were many injuries, but miraculously none were deadly.

The subjugation was complete.

Ilya confirmed the ice dragon's ruin with [Clairvoyance]. The reason why she didn't speak about it having an injured arm and eye was because she

didn't want them to become negligent.

It was effective and the subjugation group started the battle keeping a good tension. They were able to complete the commission. Although it was unexpected, the battle itself folded out roughly as Ilya planned.

However for Ilya, if there was something in the future, she didn't want to waver.

"Pi...?"

"No, it's nothing."

"Pi!"

Even if she grumbled about it, there was no helping it. It was something that she decided.

So Ilya shook it off.

If she broke here, she would lose the qualifications to resent the ice dragon too.

Although she was thinking about such a selfish topic, that was the only thing she absolutely would never allow.

“Ilya-chan, I want to accept this commission.”

“Certainly. Please present your registration card.”

And so, she continued her duties as a receptionist today as well.

Epilogue

Later. Due to the scattered elements and magical power from the ice dragon's corpse, Lunéville experienced some abnormal weather in the way of snowfall.

While the commission completion was being processed on the branch's first floor, both Ilya and Frank, as well as Annabelle, a branch staff member that assessed raw materials, scowled at the ice dragon's horn that was taken out to be assessed on the third floor's parlor.

"Ilya… what do you think?"

"…Either way, it's strange."

Right. When Anabelle asked that, Frank responded saying that the horn was odd.

Usually, horns in general—not just a dragon's—would reflect the elements that the creature carried. The color on the surface was irrelevant, but the color on the inside… for ice dragons, it should be blue with some green particles sprinkled throughout.

However, the color inlaid in this horn was black.

"...Monstrification."

"Monstri... what?"

"Do you know about the thing called miasma?"

The two looked at each other and Frank nodded.

"It's the mist that turns something into a monster when you stay in it too long, right?"

"That's the general consensus, but it's actually different. It's toxic to most living things, but it is something like a drug for monsters that invigorates them and increases their magic source. Miasma is similar to a powerful medicine that incites monsters into mutating and enhances them, sending them into a frenzy. It is called monstrification as the miasma mutates the magic source inside the bodies of monsters."

Although the two people were staring in puzzlement at first, Frank opened his mouth in confusion before long.

"But didn't you say that dragons aren't monsters?"

“Yes. That’s why it is unlikely.”

If it went through monstrification, its nature would be forgotten, and it would travel meaninglessly… even the reason it attacked people until being injured could be explained by its intellect dulling.

However, the problem was something different. What caused it?

The only things that are able to cause monstrification and tamper with the bodies of living things that aren’t monsters… was a demon.

Demons that were powerful enough to even interfere with the bodies of divine beasts, higher forms of life?

Those capable of that? They were called evil gods.

Side Story – Ilya's Cheat Acquaintances

The five people who departed Lunéville for the tyrant spider subjugation walked along the road.

Chris, Selena, and Eric walked in the front, Lula following after them with York in the back. Rather than calling their current formation something like a subjugation group's order, it was more like they were tourists taking a stroll.

Chris turned back to face the two trailing behind while still walking.

"The name's Chris. Leader of [Stars of the Eternal Night]."

Lula and York weren't able to react to his sudden introduction that well. Selena, seeing them, sighed and gave Chris a cold look.

"Hey, that's beyond sudden."

"But really, there're lots of problems with not knowing their names!"

Chris smiled broadly. Selena gave another sigh and Eric smiled wryly.

“That’s right. I’m Eric. We’re part of the team called [Stars of the Eternal Night] in the mercenary guild.”

“Similarly, I am Selena. Pleased to meet you.”

It seemed the three from the mercenary guild were sociable enough. Looking at each other, Lula and York’s expressions didn’t change much.

“…Lula. Not affiliated to anything in particular. My regards.”

Towards her businesslike manner that changed completely from what it was beforehand, the three members of [Stars of the Eternal Night] blinked.

Meanwhile, York wasn’t surprised at Lula’s attitude and remained calm.

“I am York. Please treat me well.”

“Ah, y-yeah. Treat me well…”

“M—… my regards.”

York smiled wryly at the three who weren’t able to

hide their bewilderment.

“Don’t mind this idiot. She’s normally like this whenever she isn’t near Ilya-sama.”

Even being called an idiot, Lula didn’t react at all. She looked like she truly didn’t care at all, from the bottom of her heart.

“I’ve heard the name [Stars of the Eternal Night]. In particular, there was a story about exterminating a demon being talked about even in the magic guild.”

Although he was clearly praising them, the three held mutual wry smiles. Seeing York’s questioning expression, Chris responded.

“We did definitely defeat a demon but well, it wasn’t just us. Ilya was together with us.”

“So saying something like it’s just our achievement is a bit…”

Understanding their previous pained-looking expressions, York smiled slightly.

“Ilya-sama probably said to keep it a secret didn’t

she?"

"Yeah! Even though without Ilya's support I have nooo clue how it would've turned out!"

"She has no interest at all in fame and wealth after all."

"Right right! Even though we got so many rewards from the country and the association, she'd just disappear when I try to give her any!"

Although it seemed like she was just grumbling after that, in fact, she was saying nothing but praises.

Reaching a point where the topic settled down, Selena spoke to Lula.

"Lula-san, would you like to join in?"

"...Not really. For things about other people than Ilya, I truly have no interest at all."

Although she wanted to say something back at that unusual statement, she swallowed her words back down.

Furthermore, although they weren't as long as a

beastkin's, Lula's long ears only ever twitched when hearing something she was interested in. No one would intentionally point that out though.

For example, when York proposed a question to the other three without minding Lula's condition.

"If you don't mind, could you tell me about what it was like when Ilya-sama traveled with you all?"

"Of course."

With her immediate reply, the five of them roused over a common topic: Ilya.

The group, which recovered their stamina by camping next to the forest, decided to wait until the sky brightened before starting their subjugation strategy.

First was to confirm their invasion route.

"—Oh soldiers that exchanged blood with Eric Bridge, show your forms, please lend your strength."

A shining pattern of geometric lines ran underneath Eric's feet, expanding.

As the design finished forming along the flat surface of

the ground, it rose vertically away from the ground towards the sky.

First were legs.

The pattern rising to outline multiple silhouettes, next to appear were tails, followed by torsos, then wings and arms, then finally their heads. Three wyverns appeared.

"...Wonderful."

York said in admiration while watching the wyverns bring their heads to Eric.

Although wyverns were just a subspecies of flying dragons, even if they were weaker, they were still a species of dragon.

Compared to flying dragons, part of their wings were assimilated into their forelegs. They had less methods to attack with, but had great flying capability.

Although wyverns seemed excellent if you viewed them as mounts, you normally couldn't contract them and had to train them.

However, Eric just showed himself summoning them. In other words, rather than training them, he contracted them.

What was required for a summoning contract was magical power beyond whatever the target was, as well as an unyielding strength will.

As a result of having your magical power taken away if you failed a contract, there was a chance of dying even if they put up resistance.

Furthermore, to have three summoned simultaneously would require at least enough magical power for the three of them, to say nothing of the strength of will required to manage them.

Even Lula let out her voice in admiration at it.

“We’ll go in groups of two. As combinations though.”

“Divided into groups of vanguards and rear guards. That way it’ll be easier to work together.”

Chris continued Eric’s statement.

His tone wasn’t different from his usual one, but one

could feel the self-confidence and persuasiveness from his accumulated experience in it.

“Next is… what kind of tactics to go with, then?”

“Ilya also said to prevent damaging the area, so we’ll go with a quick attack!”

Ilya’s words. Two people reacted to that.

“Then first I’ll stop its movement.”

“I’ll smash the tyrant’s outer layer with a swift attack.”

“After that, us vanguards will end it.”

Chris finished up York and Lula’s proposals.

Although that strategy was a very sketchy strategy, there wasn’t a single person who felt anxious about it.

As for the combinations mounted onto the wyverns in two person pairs, Chris and Selena were the vanguards, York and Eric were the rear guards. Left over, Lula took one by herself.

There were monsters that could fly in the air nearby, but none of them could match the velocity of the wyverns. Their group immediately took off above the

top of the forest into the open air.

Here and there were places mowed down by the tyrant spider's huge body, there were clusters of living things scattered about that were likely caught by its thread.

Standing in the center of it all was a huge spider, so big as to make it seem like their perception of distance from it was off.

No sooner than the group saw it, the tyrant spider that also saw them displayed a quick movement. It ejected thread from its abdomen at an arrow's speed.

Easily dodging it, magical power suddenly began to be stimulated.

"Undine."

A giant spirit appeared raising its hands to the sky not at York's back, but above the giant spider.

At that moment, water spouted from the ground like a geyser erupted. The tyrant spider was unsteady from the force of the impact.

"—Ice Lock."

The magic that York invoked in that instant was made to freeze its joints.

The surface of the frozen water had no waves. Towards that cooperated magic that flowed peacefully, Eric exhaled in uncomprehending admiration.

Then, in that next instant. Five gigantic boulders appeared high in the sky above the great spirit.

Looking at the boulders, with a slight smile, Undine melted into the sky.

"—Strike… Nova!"

Finishing the chant, the boulders descended at a velocity where they seemed to disappear.

As for the giant spider whose joints were frozen, it wasn't able to defend properly.

It received direct hits from the huge masses.

By being practically smashed down, the ice restraints that held the tyrant spider broke. It moved slightly.

It's vitality was admirable, but the exoskeleton that

was its strong point had cracked due to the meteorite's impacts, with its flesh being crushed and torn as well.

Even so, it may have been its pride as a strong creature that had hunted countless creatures, but its mouth continued to move restlessly as though to express its rage, fixing its compound eyes on its hateful enemies.

However—

"Descending Light—"

A sword of light soared down.

"—Ascending Flash!"

Burned by the light, it couldn't recover itself.

They could feel their enemy's temperature from that far away.

However, the tyrant that ruled over the unknown world was confused and could only see darkness, attempting to move away and distance itself from this foreign enemy. Unknowingly, this was the first time it had felt fear.

"Forceful Magic—"

It hadn't noticed that it was stepping further into hell.

"—Colliding Waves, Break!!"

It felt something touch its legs.

Just after feeling that, the magical power in its surroundings raged, ripping apart more of its exoskeleton and exploding its flesh.

The event was so abnormal that the tyrant didn't notice that its balance had been destroyed.

"Forceful Waves!"

"Gleaming Blaze!"

"" Melting Ground, Scorched Earth!! ""

It realized that the ground below it would suddenly collapse, but the earth that should have collapsed suddenly heated up, its surrounding transforming into a bubbling prison of magma.

The tyrant couldn't understand it.

Until just a moment ago, it was standing at the top of the world.

Other creatures were nothing but prey to it, running away just from the sight of it. Even if there were occasionally some that fought back, it wouldn't suffer even a single wound to its body. It enriched its hunger by teasing the weak.

It wasn't enough to rampage about. It wanted more prey, more prey to chew up.

That's what it desired for itself.

However, an overwhelming power appeared.

It didn't expect something like this to happen.

Still, it just wanted to act violently.

As for what could damage that tyrant—

"Transcending Excellence! Transcendent Saint Sword Striiiiiike!"

By the overwhelming heat generated by Chris' pillar of light that burned everything to nothing, it died.

While feeling the torrent of that enormous power, the group looked at their comrades in satisfaction.

To their feelings—

"...That's a weird name."

Lula muttered.

And so the five of them, still mounted on the wyverns, got on their way back towards Lunéville.

While there were people surprised at how soon they returned, Ilya, who came out to meet them, processed their commission's completion in a calm manner.

"I have validated the commission's completion. For the raw materials..."

"" ... ... ""

They didn't have any.

"Then, your reward will be four million gils per person. Would you like it in cash? Or transferred to your account?"

"" Account. ""

They were just asked by formality of course. No one assumed they'd be rewarded in cash for it.

To begin with, there's no possible way the branch

would have the absurd sum of twenty million on hand.

“Thank you very much. We look forward to your next visit.”

With that, the tyrant’s uproar had concluded… not.

(… Now for this.)

These five people didn’t come here just for the subjugation.

“Ilya, please come with us!”

“Let’s travel together again! It’ll surely be more enjoyable than before!”

There was an invisible wall somewhere in their previous travels for everyone. Though compared to that journey that was cancelled midway through, it certainly would be a much more enjoyable time than before.

However, towards Ilya who hadn’t agreed, Chris’ expression tightened.

“…Besides, it’s said that a demon appeared in the south.”

“We’re all going to go defeat it. We hope you’ll help us.”

There was a demon that appeared in the south, but Ilya knew that wasn’t the thing they were aiming for.

She knew that it wouldn’t help even if she stopped them, and even if they went, winning wouldn’t be a problem with their own strength.

(Hmm? Wait a moment?)

Thinking about their mention about the south, Ilya recalled a certain person.

Taking that into mind, Ilya changed what she was about to say and smiled towards the three people.

“It’s alright. If it’s you all, you can win.”

“We’re not just talking about power!”

“Even so, it’s alright. Because you’ll gain a new comrade.”

Not understanding what she meant, the three inclined their heads at the same time.

Realizing it couldn’t be helped, Ilya gave them another

hint.

“Go to Lant Volcano. I think you’ll have a wonderful encounter there.”

Finishing saying that, Ilya felt considerably embarrassed.

(Eh, what’s this mastermind? Some person that pulls strings from the shadows?) Note 12)

While she was feeling abashed by herself, York, who had sensed something, opened his mouth.

However, before he was able to understand anything, the others silenced him with a “Shh!” gesture.

“…Got it. Ilya said it, so it’ll somehow work out.”

“But still, we are friends.”

“We’ll absolutely meet again.”

“Cyaaa!”

Leaving behind statements that were beyond sincere, the boys and girls left.

If they met the great spirit salamander that lived in

Lant Volcano, Selena, who held good affinity with the fire attribute, would be able to form a contract with the great spirit.

When Ilya was traveling with her, the girl was always afraid of being a burden to everyone else.

It was nothing but an imaginary fear judging from the other two and Ilya, though.

(With that, that girl's self-confidence should be a little better.)

After gazing at the three's backs, Ilya looked through the window outside.

She wasn't looking at it, but her consciousness turned towards the great spirit in Lant Volcano.

(... If it leaves even a single burn on Selena, I'll beat that lizard to death.)

Far away, the salamander laying dormant in Lant Volcano suddenly jumped up to its feet from feeling a certain blood lust. Having no way to know it was from her this time, it sank into the magma.

When Ilya looked back to the branch's dining hall, Lula stood in front of her with a smile that stretched across her entire face.

"So then Ilya, marry me!"

"That's impossible."

('So then'? What do you mean by 'so then'?)

Lula collapsed and sobbed lightly from Ilya's immediate response. Compared to when Ilya had first met her, she was much more expressive now.

"Failed again~"

"Please, don't mind other people and simply expand your own horizons. Even though studying magic is good, it is also important to move your body... Right. I think something like spearmanship would be fun."

"That's..."

"Please think about it yourself. What do you like?"

Ilya had tried to have her solve the problem herself, but—

"Un! I love Ilya!"

“Wai—nnn…”

Getting embraced, her lips were sealed for her.

“See you next time!”

“Uu… that kiss demon…”

Not minding anyone, that woman would kiss Ilya the moment she had a chance.

If Ilya had her true strength, avoiding even her surprise attacks would be easy. But Lula may feel like she’s being rejected if she refused her kisses. Her body unconsciously stiffened the moment she thought about that. There’s no way she could do it.

(I’m not happy! But I’d be crying if I weren’t originally a man!)

However, the person in question hadn’t noticed this herself.

(Quickly go and swipe that magic spear from the demon to raise your [Spearmanship] skill.)

Ilya thought as she watched her leave. However, there was a person whose gaze sent even more wicked

thoughts than Lula.

“That dark elf…!”

(Ah, it’s that guy again.)

York took a deep breath, turning towards Ilya. He went to his knees and placed both hands on the floor, looking up towards Ilya.

“Ilya-sama. I will not ask you to please accept me as your pupil. However, somehow… somehow, please meet with the eldest…”

Saying that, he lowered his head and performed a dogeza.

Seeing his appearance—

(Uwaah… he a dogeza’d…)

He did it seriously.

Elf held pride above all else. They would probably go bald if they performed a dogeza in public.

(Wasteful for an ikemen.) Note 13)

Shaking away her inconsequential thoughts, Ilya

answered York.

“Rejected.”

“Wha—”

Her rejection was undeniable.

“That jiji said to call for me right? Tell him to come himself if he wants to meet. That much is the minimum courtesy.” Note 14)

“...Yes.”

And so, York wearily took his leave.

The elder Ilya knew was an obstinate and stubborn person, he wouldn’t even leave the village much less leave for human villages. In other words, her response was an indirect way of breaking off relations.

Since she knew that he would be involved in her turmoil with the elder, she considered sending some hair tonic as recompense for his anxiety. While Ilya was seriously troubled about it, a great vortex of power arose.

[Could you not advise that child?]

Queen Undine of Water. Towards the pure womanly form that aligned Ilya's—who dislike men—preferences, Ilya shook her head.

By using her [Translation] skill, she could translate and talk even in the spirit's language.

[He is walking directly down his best path. It's perfect if you support him.]

[I am glad with your saying that… Even so, the others were able to receive something, he may sulk and stray from his path.]

Ilya responded to the great spirit's laugh with a wry smile.

[It can't be helped, then.]

She passed an earring that was in her apron's pocket by chance to Undine.

[This is?]

[An earring said to be made from a water dragon's horn. If you talk to him, he may be able to understand something.]

[That child, he hasn't heard that person's story, has he?]

Their mutual thoughts transmitted, the two exchanged a chuckle.

Possibly due to the arrogance of being a genius, York had a strong tendency to look down upon others.

However, having accepted this time's subjugation that went without any problems, he was able to personally witness the famous [Stars of the Eternal Nights]' member's strength firsthand. It was for this reason that he also admitted Lula's true strength.

He had that kind of a personality, but Undine couldn't help but be endearing towards him.

[Excuse me, but I must leave. Goodbye, child of god.]

In the next instant, Undine stood beside York. When she handed him the earring, York attempted to turn back and run towards the branch.

As for his feet being frozen in place, that was simply an unfortunate accident. Although some people fainted from seeing the bizarre phenomenon of a person

moving as though being dragged away, Ilya decided to not mind it.

It was finally over now.

Although everyone in the dining hall were overwhelmed by the famous people, the atmosphere returned to normal as they settled down one by one. The dining hall was filled with its usual chatter after a few minutes had elapsed.

“Ilya, was that alright?”

“Eh?”

When she looked at the dining hall, Ria had stood next to her before she realized it.

“I mean, aren’t those person amazing? Everyone seemed to think Ilya was indispensable…”

“Un. I’m very glad, I love them as well… however.”

Everyone had a path they had to choose themselves. There were no fake turns, that’s what Ilya believed.

Therefore, she had also gone down the path she chose for herself.

It wasn't for anyone else's sake, it was for her own way of life.

"This town, and everyone in it... I love them."

That's why, for right now, she believed she was fine.

Until the time where their roads intersect once again —

—Gently and happily, she would live.

Translator's Notes

Note 1

A porte-cochère is a covered entrance large enough for vehicles to stop or pass through, allowing passengers to be discharged.

Back

Note 2

A Qilin, also written as Kirin, is a mythical chimera between a dragon and a horse originating from Far-East Asian mythology.

Back

Note 3

A Horned Serpent, also known as a Great Serpent, originates from oral history of many Native American cultures, specifically in the Southeastern Woodlands and Great Lakes areas.

Back

Note 4

Haku's name, written in kana (ハク), appears inside of the Japanese term for White Dragon, Haku Ryuu (白竜).

Back

Note 5

Yakitori is kind of skewered meat grilled over a charcoal fire, with the skewer itself generally being made of wood. Typically served with a sort of sauce.

Back

Note 6

Oni are a sort of yokai (spirit/demon) from traditional Japanese mythology. Often translated as ogres or demons in contemporary English works, they tend to have sharp claws and wild hair, with horns sprouting from their heads. The vey image of fear.

Back

Note 7

The saluki is a dog breed originating from the Fertile Crescent (ie: the Cradle of Civilization, 'Mesopotamia

was here'-type thing). Known for their eyesight and have droopy ears with long, curved tails.

Back

Note 8

Not sure if this explanation is necessary, but 'pugilist' is just another word for 'unarmed fighter'.

Back

Note 9

For a good description of what tsukkomis are and what brought them about, I highly recommend reading this entry of a few sentences.

Back

Note 10

Satchet!

Back

Note 11

Recall this line from Chapter 2: Rumors like Orbwight Kingdom's arena being closed due to racket about

fixed matches or an ice dragon seen northeast Akradist Kingdom, things like that.

Back

Note 12

Talking about herself here. Mmm, she's tsukkomi'ing herself.

Back

Note 13

Ikemen -> Good looking guy.

Back

Note 14

Jiji is sort of a playful and/or impolite to say old man. Like "that geezer".

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